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NO LADY WITH A PEN

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NO LADY WITH A PEN

By
URSULA BLOOM



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DEDICATION

My Pen . . . To You!

NOTE

In writing this story of my early struggles in Fleet Street, I have found it impossible to avoid the repetition of some minor incidents which have already been recounted in previous books, and I ask the reader to accept my apologies for this.

U.B.

CHAPTER ONE

My pen, when young, did eagerly frequent
My father's desk, and heard great argument. . . .

"**I** want to be a writer," said No Lady, aged three.

"Well, you can't be, so there!" said my nurse.

"I still want to be a writer," said No Lady, in whom, to this day, persistence is the dominating factor.

"Don't talk so silly!" said my nurse.

Dear, kind, affectionate and *understanding* Nurse (if still alive), who talks so silly now?

"I want to be a writer," I said when very young, and I spent every odd moment of my infant life in scribbling. My family ignored it. They considered that children went through trying phases of this kind, and the fact that my father was an author had probably been responsible for putting the ridiculous idea into my silly little head. The sooner I got it out again the better it would be for everybody concerned.

I wrote on everything, including the wallpaper (emphatically forbidden). I was allowed to possess the discarded paper thrown into the waste-paper basket, but other and better stuff was, they felt, wasted on me. Nothing daunted my fervour and I continued *diligently*.

"What? Is that child **STILL** at it?" cried the family who, as time went on, got a bit sick of my persistence.

She was!

She still is!

At five years old I won a prize in a twopenny magazine called *Our Home*, for the best letter of the week. I say to my shame that my mother wrote the letter, and I copied it out, with no interest whatsoever,

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because I considered it to be an insult, as I wished to do my own writing.

"Look what dear little Ursula has done!" purred the family waving the copy of *Our Home*. When I disclosed that 'dear little Ursula' had merely copied out her mother's letter and had signed it with her own name, I had my hands slapped for revealing what was supposed to be a dark secret.

"She's so imaginative," said my mother, trying to cover her own part in the deceit with those outraged friends to whom I had chatted so indiscreetly.

At seven years old I published an indifferent little book called *Tiger*, mainly written by my parents who explained it to me on the grounds that they didn't want me to make a fool of myself in print! A copy was sent by my ambitious mother to the then Prince Eddy of York, and a letter came back from Marlborough House, saying that "Prince Edward has read it and asks me to say that he likes the story of *Tiger* very much."

This encouraged the family, who inflicted the next one on Princess Mary. *Girlie* did happen to be my own unaided work, tied with blue ribbon, and I should think quite unreadable. These valiant efforts were all printed by a kindly local printer, and sold at a bob a time, which they were definitely not worth.

Girlie realized eighteen shillings (my circulation was not large) and I was forced to invest this money in a silver card case for "when I grew up", all of which I found to be most unsatisfactory.

On my own account I wrote a short article, and scraping together the money from my pocket allowance of twopence a week (supposed to be dedicated to hair ribbons), I offered the effort to *Home Chat*, and won an imitation silver jam spoon. I had hoped for half-a-crown, which I considered (and still consider) my effusion to have been worth, and was therefore considerably shaken when the jam spoon arrived at the

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rectorial breakfast table, where it caused something of a sensation.

"Where on earth did the child get that thing from?" asked everybody at once.

Personally I hoped that all the London editors did not pay in jam spoons, because I needed to reimburse valuable money expended on postage, and also to reinforce my hair ribbons. But I believed (quite erroneously) that the jam spoon had established me permanently on the ladder of fame, and was to be somewhat quickly disillusioned.

It is true that I did sell one more story, a most morbid affair entitled *In the Midst of Death we are in Life*, to a church magazine which had the bad taste to like it, otherwise I was a flop. I wrote laborious short stories, offering them to such widely diverse markets as *The Strand Magazine*, *Little Folks*, *Tit-Bits*, and *Home Chat*, feeling that if they missed the boat in one sphere of action, they would undoubtedly do in another. They did for me, for the difficulty of keeping pace with the postage of twopence a week wasn't possible. Weeding the garden of dandelions at a half-penny for a hundred heads (and doing the counting myself) was far more profitable.

Financial embarrassment of a serious nature called a halt on posting to cruel editors, though I still wrote feverishly, and annually appealed in the most heart-rending terms to Father Christmas to "put a typewriter in my stocking." But he also was a hard old man, and did nothing about it.

Kind friends who trotted me along to toy shops, saying, "Now what would you like most in the world, dear?" were horrified when I replied with the promptitude of one who *does* know her own mind:

"I want a typewriter!"

Christmas and birthday presents took the form of writing books, and nothing pleased me better than these, but finding a suitable market for my wares was not so

easy. Determined not to be beaten on a problem that others had solved before me, I wrestled with it. Finally at eleven years old I decided that as editors were so entirely devoid of understanding, the only thing to do was to become an editor myself, and so have no truck with them!

I launched out upon my editorial activities on a financial basis that would have delighted the hearts of even the most finicky shareholders.

The outlay consisted of twelve penny exercise books, one for each month of the year; this was a Christmas present from my mother (who had tried to persuade me into accepting three pairs of Merino combinations instead, but had had no luck!) and they cost me nothing at all. The only other outlay consisted of three chocolate frogs with the most vivid raspberry cream centres. These were separately the first, second and third prizes, to be given away monthly on the competition pages of my most attractive periodical.

I wrote my first number personally throughout, editing the magazine under the pseudonym of "Uncle Tom" (fictitious, Father-Christmassy old gentleman). There was a serial story with the most exciting curtain, under a pseudonym (famous novelist and playwright, well-known in only the best literary circles, Miss V. Gage. I have no idea what the V. stood for, but V. Gage was myself all right). Puzzle pages; answers to be sent in with threepenny stamp entrance fee, prizes one penny chocolate frogs, three in number; clear gain of twopence per prizewinner, threepence per non-prize winner! Three short stories. A page for "Our wee Members", with serial for tots; household hints pages copied from other magazines, and several most lavish free advertisements for Beecham's Pills, Pears' Soap, and Harrod's Stores, never acknowledged by said firms, but given most generously all the same.

Touting my less fortunate friends, I managed to

muster a membership of seven families per month, each of whom contributed the sum of one shilling a year (paid in advance), and they had to post their copy to the next reader on a given date, heavily underlined in each number. Fines were imposed if there was any delay, and these were rigorously enforced and collected with all possible speed by Uncle Tom (on bicycle), who was only too grateful for the chance.

I also arranged that the first household to receive my magazine on the first of the month, was the Keighley-Peaches, because then I could bicycle over with my copy and therefore save Uncle Tom from incurring any regrettable losses on the postage side.

The Playfellow was the name of this valuable contribution to the magazine world, and it flourished for six solid years, bringing Uncle Tom a big reputation, and quite a lot of money for one so young. In fact from his "Blind Pig" competition, with thirty-six entries, he made nine shillings clear profit, because the first prizewinner returned his chocolate frog saying that he never ate sweets, and the second prizewinner was shamed into doing the same thing, so that Uncle Tom was in the delightful position of eating his own prize!

But the enormous advantage of my magazine was that it had no opportunity of refusing my own stories, which was exactly what I required.

Richard Aldington and Hughes Massie were among some of my most omnivorous readers. In fact Richard was made to contribute articles; naturally he got no payment, merely Uncle Tom's kindly pat on the back, on the principle of You're-getting-on-famously-little man! And Hughes Massie was so overcome at winning one of the chocolate frogs, that he once contributed a poem:

This doggerel may be badly put
But I send it with aplomb
And it brings from one—Hughes Massie
Kindest thanks to Uncle Tom.

The extraordinary thing was that my family heartily disapproved of *The Playfellow*, and it had to be 'put to bed' surreptitiously. I had to feign colds and keep away from church so as to get my nose down to it; once I'd got the family into the church I knew that they were dead safe for a good hour, during which time the editorial offices fairly hummed. Its chocolate frog prizes had to be dispatched with the greatest possible secrecy, and the aid of Minnie, a friendly parlourmaid (alluded to in the professional jargon as "the Sub").

For the family had long ago decided that I could not be a writer, but must be a violinist, because I'd look so sweet playing *Ave Maria* in a blue sash. I was rather the type of child that looks blue-sashy! The family did not read *The Playfellow*, they thought it was a childish effort, and I lived in perpetual terror that one of these days the heavy hand of the law would come down upon my playroom, and the wretched thing would be stopped for good.

Therefore one summer holiday at St. Margaret's Bay, I was completely horrified when Hughes Massie spoke to my father about it. *The Playfellow* was at that time running a good strong serial, about parents who had taken a trip to India (which I thought to be most sophisticated), and on walking into their home in England again, were met by the maid who informed them, to their great surprise, that they had got another baby! This had been my "curtain" and had caused a considerable stir amongst my readers! As a curtain, I consider that I have never been able to cap it. It leaves the reader paralysed with curiosity.

"You ought to let that child take up writing," said Hughes Massie.

"She is going in for the violin."

"She's a damned rotten violinist," said he, "but she has got a facile pen."

My father thought that over, and then said that there

was no money in writing. There was, of course, only one answer to this, and Hughes Massie, making it, silenced my shocked parent. Hughes Massie wanted to boom me as a child prodigy in America, and I wrote a book of the *Young Visitors* type for him. But by the time the family had revised my extremely casual spelling, and had added the crowning insult in the shape of their own title (*A Child's Idea of the Eternal*), my book was sunk, lock, stock, and barrel.

Hughes Massie didn't like it, and the American publishers didn't either. I don't wonder. It never was my book; it had been heavily edited by the family, and hadn't half the nous of the poor old *Playfellow*, which they never saw. In vain did Hughes Massie quote *The Viper of Milan* as an example of what a girl could do; the family insisted that the violin was a better bet and gave him Marie Hall against Marjorie Bowen.

So I had to go on with the violin, most unfortunately passing examinations which I should have done far better to fluff, because every success gave the family the most immense encouragement. *The Playfellow* died. In my teens they felt that I had become too old for serials of so absorbing a nature. The last number went to press with tears.

I now proceeded to pour my talent into really fruity novels impregnated with sex, when I myself had no idea of the facts of life! Seven of these ambitious efforts had gone into the waste-paper basket before I was eighteen; up till then *The Playfellow* was the best thing I had done, being quite unrivalled in its sphere of action.

However, from my schoolroom I had managed to get composers interested in my lyrics for songs. The family did not rebel against poetry, which they thought was more artistic.

Coming home from Birmingham on the "cheap day",

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I wrote a ballad on the paper bag in which reposed a malt loaf. The ballad ran:

Little red house on the long white hill,
Sleepy sad stream, and little old mill;
Battered old boat tied fast to the bank
Where the grass grows coarsely, ragged and rank;
Hushed are the feet that have over you trod,
And hidden away in the garden of God.
But I think of you, long for you, love you still,
Little red house on the long white hill.

This, Edmund la Touche set to music, and to my great surprise published with Messrs. Enoch. It was recorded by a gramophone recording firm and I was paid seven-and-sixpence.

"This is *money!*!" I gasped, and on the strength of it wrote yards of the most revolting doggerel. One, which I thought most pathetic (nobody else did), ran:

I have told my tale to the lilies,
In summer they heard of my sorrow;
They died down in the garden bed
Hiding each lovely drooping head,
And they woke with tears on the morrow.

"Dear, I do so wish you wouldn't do it," said Edmund la Touche, "God alone knows what it all means!"

He did however publish a love song of mine called *Yvonne*, another *Love-in-a-mist*, and a lullabye called *The Land of Let's Pretend*, which was the most blatant copy of somebody else's work.

Like all young writers, I went through the adolescent stage of writing dramatic versions of my own death, largely inspired by Christina Rosetti's *When I am dead, my dearest*. Naturally all these went the same way as my sex novels, joining the great unwanted in the waste-paper basket. Then I had a bright idea, which was to read the comic pages of *Tit-Bits*, *Pearson's Weekly*, and *Answers*, and convert the little humorous stories into verses of a few lines, and then offer them to the *Red*

Magazine, the *Royal*, and the *Novel*. It worked; I got five shillings or seven-and-six a time for them. This was money for jam, and seeing my name in print was most encouraging.

I gave up writing about death and lilies, and roads winding uphill all the way, and launched myself into humour of this nature:

When Eve in the Garden of Eden
From her long slumber awoke,
She saw someone standing before her
Nameless before he spoke;
“Your name?” she enquired, with a feeling of dread.
“Madam, I’m Adam,” the gentleman said!

You wouldn’t have thought the *Red Magazine* would pay five bob for that, would you? But they *did*!

I was just beginning to succeed when I got married.

“Now there’ll be no need for you to go on messing about with your writing,” said my family, who had always chafed against the idea.

I had my Yost typewriter, so antiquated that it worked on an ink pad which it was impossible to replace; the machine had been sold cheaply for this reason, and also it had no “G” on it, and therefore could be guaranteed to mess up any manuscript.

“I should sell that,” said my mother, “you’ll never need it again.”

“I certainly shan’t sell it,” said I. I had a sneaking affection for the Yost, which had a cover made of American cloth, originally intended for a sewing machine, and fitting it exactly nowhere. I had purchased it out of valiant efforts of the *Playfellow* days, from Christmas tips, and the final noble assistance of a friend who gave me a pound for playing my beastly violin at the Harvest Festival. My “E” string had snapped during *Come, Ye Thankful People, Come*, and I, being young, had howled vehemently, only to be

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comforted by the pound. This had meant the final attainment of the secondhand Yost with no "G" and a sewing-machine cover, yet surely the most longed-for typewriter in all the world.

During my brief first marriage I did not write because my husband disapproved of women earning money, which he thought to be vulgar. The *Red*, the *Royal* and the *Novel* ceased to know me. It looked as if I and my life's ambition had become completely divorced. It is true that I did write tiny scraps to amuse myself, and hurriedly consigned them to the wastepaper basket, terrified of being caught at it again.

It seemed as if the career had ended.

In 1921 it began!

CHAPTER TWO

One point about No Lady's pen,
Was that it never could say "When."

I was a widow. I had a small income, and a baby son and a sick brother on my hands. It was now or never.

The Yost came into favour once more, and back into the drawing-room from which it had once been banned. I wrote stories which, in my foolishness, I believed to be delightful; I sent them to every magazine in England, and back they came with such depressing regularity that even I became anxious. It was, I decided, most unfair. Worse stories than mine were published, leastways so it seemed. Could there be a hoodoo on me, or was I myself to blame?

In this dilemma I called in Guy Thorne to help me. Guy Thorne had published a most successful best-seller called *When it was Dark*, and I had known him when I was a child at St. Margaret's Bay, where everybody seemed to wash up at some time or other. I heard that he was staying at Great Holland, and on this very slender acquaintance I persuaded him to come to tea. I don't think he knew what he was in for.

He was a bit of a surprise when he arrived, being exactly like Humpty-Dumpty in figure, which was not how I had remembered him; also he couldn't sit still, but would walk about all the time, which is one of the things that has always rattled me. I asked him about my stories, and most obligingly he read one.

"It isn't a story," he said, "it's just a sketch," which of course was true, but conveyed absolutely nothing to me, who did not know the difference between them. "You've got to get hold of a proper plot and work it out

correctly," he said, "otherwise you damn well won't sell the stuff."

How right he was!

Unfortunately I knew nothing about the working out of a plot, and I didn't realize that here was something on which I, in common with hundreds of other amateurs, was falling down all the time. What was the answer? I fogged that one out for myself. The answer very obviously lay in Fleet Street.

I felt that if only I could get to know some of the magical ladies and gents who edited papers, the rest should be too easy.

The Editor of the *Daily Mirror* was staying at Frinton, I found. For four devastating days I trailed after him, with the utmost vigilance, but no result. I never could catch up with him. When I got to the tennis club, he had left. When I went to a dance, he had always gone on somewhere else. When I dined at his hotel, he dined out with friends. He was the most elusive man I have ever met, and all I can think is that somebody warned him that the most persistent young woman in England was on his tracks.

I was living at Frinton in a small villa, which rejoiced in the ghastly name of Poona. Poona had five 'beds', and three 'sits', and all of them draughty. I kept a general maid, and a nurse for the baby, and was a fairly presentable young woman with a competence. You can imagine the result of that.

"I don't want to marry again, I want to be a writer," I said.

How foolish! thought my friends. Any fool could write. Why waste valuable youth on a stuffy job of that kind? As far as I could make out I was the one fool who couldn't write, and most enraging I found it.

But I wasn't giving up.

It so happened that I had a bit of luck at the time when I most needed it, for I fell in with a middle-aged

gentleman who had come down for a holiday, known affectionately as Colonel B. Colonel B. met me at a dance where I and several of my very fast friends were disporting ourselves in what is now by grim irony the Roman Catholic Church, but which was then Victor's Dance Hall. He was rather aesthetic, slightly sanguine, and his main occupation seemed to be stencilling bumble-bees in gold paint on gents' dark blue silk dressing gowns. He also did funny things to lampshades which he sold in Liverpool. Why Liverpool? I asked. He couldn't tell me the answer to that, except that it just *was* Liverpool.

Colonel B. did not pursue the usual and very obvious conversation of the dance partner of those days, and before very long he was being told about my wild desire to write. He listened with interest that I found surprising, seeing how my other friends treated it. Then he said that he thought he could help me.

This was news indeed.

Now Colonel B. may have looked a simple soul, but he was far more clever than anyone else I had yet met. He said that the thing I obviously needed was a collaborator who could teach me the ropes. I had never thought of that one. Surely it wouldn't be possible? He said that it would; if only I would come up to town, he'd introduce me to a few knowledgeable people. I began to think badly of Colonel B. I hadn't been a widow for a couple of years with the face of an innocent babe, without discovering that gentlemen did not get girls up to town entirely for the girls' amusement.

But here I had most grievously libelled the old boy. He did not mean anything of that sort. When I got to Berners Hotel he sent me a note suggesting where we should dine and dance. No fancy work about Colonel B.!

We dined at the Berkeley entirely frigidly. He then took me for a start to the Studio Club in Lower Regent Street, where all kinds of literary folk congregated, and

where he said we should be sure to meet somebody useful. The Studio Club was in a cellar. It had (then) modern paintings on the walls of a futurist nature, and a large barmaid called Fairy. Colonel B. was intrigued with the club, he told me that once they had had a live bear in it, but the bear smelt so awful, and gave everybody such frightful fleas, that they had had to part with it! One gala night, to give a real Bohemian atmosphere to the party, they got in a band of gipsies to play and sing to them. But the gipsies were a bit too realistic, for, besides playing and singing, they picked everybody's pockets all round, and the evening was a dead loss to the firm though the gipsies were well up on it.

There was a little peep-hole on the stairs as you went in, and you could always have a look-see through this, to make sure that there was nothing peculiar afoot; there was also a convenient exit through a man-hole at the far end, if things got a bit hot, but apparently during a raid of some kind somebody had got jammed in the manhole (Fairy? I suggested), and nowadays it wasn't so much in vogue.

Colonel B. looked through the peep-hole and saw that the Jepsons were there. Edgar Jepson was a well-known author who he thought might be useful to me, so down we went. But unfortunately with the first moment our whole campaign was completely blighted, for a young man hailed the Colonel cheerfully, with: "Hello, B. Brought your daughter with you?" from which sally he never recovered.

We didn't stay so long at the Studio Club, and, anyway, nothing strikingly useful turned up there, so we went on to Moon's to dance, and there even worse befell him. An old love of mine turned up, having brought something rather dull who he said "would do for old B. beautifully," from which moment I lost Colonel B. completely, and never heard another word

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from him until he rang me up, slightly irritated, next morning.

I went to tea at his flat, ostensibly to see the stencilled bumble-bees, but when I got to his flat (I admit I was suspecting the worst) he was very finicky. In fact he would insist on the hall porter coming up to act as chaperone for us, which left me so limp that I couldn't say a word and went dumb. The bumble-bees were far more attractive than they sound; he had also got a good line in crocodiles, only he called them alligators (by the way, are they both the same thing, and what *are* muggers?), after which we went out to dine again.

This time we neither of us suggested dancing; that hadn't gone too well on the previous evening and was best left out of the present programme, so we just talked. He had been scouting around, had found somebody who wanted a suitable collaborator, and he gave me the address. It was a reasonably well-known man writer, who had already got one woman collaborator, but being capable of immense output could do with another. The idea was, apparently, that if he wrote under a pseudonym, by using two different names he could sell work twice over in the same magazine, which, on the face of it, looked to be excellent.

He himself could not put pen to paper, Colonel B. told me, but knew everything that there was to know about plots, and sales, and editors, and would be the very man to teach me my stuff.

It was arranged that he would call on me after dinner the following evening at the Berners Hotel. Colonel B. could not be there, Liverpool was calling, something to do with alligators and lampshades, he said. He really had been most awfully good to me, and I do owe him a lot.

The next evening I was in a ferment. I knew quite well that the whole of my literary future depended on tonight. The man might hate me on sight, or he might

fall in love with me, which would be a good deal worse. If I messed up the interview, I messed up every chance I had got, and I knew it! I decided that I would try to look dignified. Being over-young, I wanted to look as old as I possibly could; a black velvet dress, and a small bunch of grapes in my hair, in other words a cross between a Bacchante and my great-grandma!

As the hour approached I got clammily nervous. Anything might happen, I felt, and probably would. Every likely-looking man who came in at the swing doors set me jittering, and what a funny lot *did* come through the swing doors that night! There was a coal-black Negro, carrying a velour hat which was lined with ruched pink silk; a very large fat man in a cloak, who I made sure was the intended collaborator; a dwarf, who turned out to be the friend of the Gents' cloaks attendant; and, after many and devious, a quiet-looking man in the forties, with the face of a sphinx, a black suit and hat so that he looked like an undertaker. He carried an ebony stick with a big silver handle, wore a ring made of a couple of brass snakes, and he came straight across to me. For a moment we both felt dreadful.

"You'd like some coffee?" I asked.

He said he would, but was probably dying for a whisky and soda, poor man.

We talked banalities for a bit, I sitting on pins of course, because far too much depended on this for my liking. I found him brusque, extremely plain-spoken, and was personally very much afraid of him. He asked me about myself and my experience of life, and like a little idiot I glossed over anything that had been real experience, but gave him a pretty picture of a lady-like little creature, who sat genteelly and sewed. He wasn't much impressed.

I felt all intelligence ebbing from my finger tips. I was going slowly bad on him, but apparently he rumbled that I had put up an idiotic façade, for he said, "Look

here, send me along something you've written. I believe that you've got it in you. You'll have to come up twice a week, and we'll talk plots, you know; we could meet here, I suppose?"

"Twice a week?" I gasped, for the fare wasn't cheap.

"You'd get a season ticket. On Monday I would give you the plot, and Thursday you'd bring it to me worked out for me to correct."

"Yes," I said, gone rather quiet.

"You have a typewriter?"

I tried to explain the Yost, but it took a lot of explaining. He said that I would have to get a proper typewriter (accent on the 'proper'), and just went on as though that was something accomplished, something done. It looked to me as though the literary career was going to be a bit expensive, for season tickets and typewriters hardly grew on blackberry bushes. If only Father Christmas had done his stuff when asked, years ago, it would have been just too easy now. The old back-slidder!

However, it takes more than that to deter the woman who has writing in her blood, as I was to discover. Next day I walked down Fleet Street for the first time in my life. I envied the men and women who went in and out of the big offices; I listened with awe to the sound of the presses in Bouverie Street; the smell of ink was in my nostrils, and I was stimulated by the little vans darting here and there with the news, hot from the press.

I'd got to do it, I told myself.

Colonel B. returned from Liverpool and he met me at Frinton that week-end, and asked me how I had got on. I told him what had happened, and dwelt with pathos on the awful financial side of the question. By now I had sent the collaborator a story; he had written back saying that he thought I had got some ideas in that "nonsensical little head" of mine, and when could we

start? I was only too eager to begin on this golden opportunity, but the financial side was holding me back.

In 1921 a house at Frinton, a baby, a sick brother *and* income tax were pretty hard nuts to crack! I could just make do on my income, and only just. Hadn't I got something I could sell? asked Colonel B.

I clung with sentiment to the jewellery that my husband had given me, none of which was exceptional, but I wanted to keep it, and then I remembered that he had left a fairly good pair of guns.

"Guns spoil with keeping," said Colonel B.

"They are for the baby," I told him.

"The baby won't be able to fire them for about eighteen years, and if they're left all that time they'll blow up on him!" said Colonel B., with truth.

He came home with me to inspect the guns, apparently already they had been somewhat neglected. The Colonel thought that they would sell well, and suggested a suitable firm (I had no ideas at all on this subject, being the most un-gunny woman); the Colonel suggested that I should 'borrow' the money from the baby. The baby had unfortunately no option or choice.

Weighing it all up, it seemed to me that if I could make good on the gun money, I could be of more use to the baby as a successful authoress than as I was now; on the other hand, if I failed, and so far I hadn't done too well, he would be a pair of guns down, and might reproach me forcefully when he grew up.

"If you ask me," said Colonel B., "I'd never tell him about them if you do make a mess of it, and lose the lot. One thing's certain, he'll never know."

"Oh, I couldn't possibly do that," said I, always the most scrupulous soul about that sort of thing, though the complete cheat in lots of other ways.

The guns were sold.

They made me just over thirty pounds, and cost me three times that to replace eighteen years later. And

what happened to them? I'll tell you. Young Hopeful never even fired them; not only did he never even fire them, having fussed over them in the shop as being the glory of youthful existence, but they were sent home, and he immediately mislaid them with a wife he was trying to get rid of. But that's by the way. It does show the curious trend of life, all the same. . . .

I put the money into a small box in my bedroom, on the same principle as, when young, I stored my secret finances from the *Playfellow* in a doll's wardrobe, taking them out to look at carefully from time to time. Just over thirty pounds seemed to me to be an awful lot of money, and I was investing it in a career; until the last farthing was exhausted I intended to put every ounce I'd got into that career. I bought a third-class season ticket (three months for £7.18.6 I believe), after which the thirty pounds never looked quite so glorious again.

Help mercifully came to me in my quest for a typewriter. Judge Dumas' daughters had a little thing called a Blick which had been in their Christmas stocking one 25th December. They had not prayed for it as I had prayed for mine, but their papa, hoping that he could persuade them to type his letters for him, had bought the Blick as a gentle hint. It was too much of a gentle hint, and the girls thought that if they lent it to me, they couldn't be badgered any more. So the Blick came to Poona, and although I am sure that it was a most admirable machine, it *was* a toy typewriter, and the work that it did was not entirely suited to Fleet Street.

The season ticket becoming mine, I worked out what my two days a week in London would cost me. There would be lunches, for a woman must eat. Lyons' was my Mecca. My idea was to make the money last as long as I possibly could; the longer it lasted, the greater chance I had of becoming famous and redeeming the baby's

guns. I could not manage lunch on less than seven-pence, stew and Norfolk dumpling was fivepence, and the twopence over was for roll or coffee; obviously I couldn't have both! Rissole was fourpence, but did not comprise both meat *and* pudding, as stew with Norfolk dumpling could be considered to do.

'Bus fares and Tubes could be cut as fine as possible, and I would have to walk where I could. I reckoned that the money would last me six months (even with typing paper the price that it was), and during that six months I ought to learn how to write a short story, and perhaps sell a few to reimburse the exchequer.

Anything I made had to go back into the bank in my bedroom. That was how I began.

On the first eventful Monday, the collaborator met me on the balcony of Berners Hotel, looking very serious and with notes in his hand. I was full of Lyons' stew and Norfolk dumpling, though I pretended that I had had lunch at Berners, because I thought that it sounded classier.

The first plot was all about a hunchback who got himself washed up in a lighthouse, and then proceeded to attempt rudery with the lighthouse keeper's wife when the husband was ashore buying the vegs! He had got the number of words all cut and dried, and the notes gave me the travelling speed of the story from one point to the next, all of which opened my eyes a lot. When finished, it was to be offered to the *Premier Magazine*, and please, would I bring it back on Thursday?

"Certainly," said I, with some inward misgiving, but always businesslike.

We had coffee, and I caught the five-thirty back to Frinton, feeling that really I was going to make good, except that I didn't know too much about lighthouses, and had an uneasy feeling that if I wasn't careful it might sound rather melodramatic, especially the last

bit when he flung himself, hump and all, into the old leaky boat, and got drowned in a maelstrom.

Next morning the Blick was in action on the dining-room table, and all the world and its wife came to chi-ike me. They thought that I was an utter fool to waste a lovely morning on that sort of nonsense when I might be on the beach.

I had now discovered that four double-spaced quarto sheets went to a thousand words, and that the hunchback was to have four thousand words. At the time I had tried to hide the fact that the length appalled me, and it appalled me a good deal more when I and my borrowed Blick settled in for a morning of it.

My idea was to write it straight off; it wouldn't need corrections. However, the hunchback proved to be a brute, and I had to do him three times, and then wasn't at all happy about him. On the Thursday I took myself off to Berners with the manuscript; seven-pennyworth at Lyons', and fourpennyworth to and from, constituting the additional expense.

My new collaborator had decided on a startling pseudonym. He had chosen the alarming one of Cashel Thunder.

"That'll make them think!" said he.

It made me think, too! I thought it was awful but couldn't very well say so because obviously he knew better than I did, but Ursula Bloom and Cashel Thunder sounded fantastic to me. We went on to the balcony and I handed over the manuscript. I have always felt a pretty good fool when other people read my manuscripts in my presence, and although I tried to control my personal feelings of shyness, I felt deadly.

Presently he said, "You can't spell. There's no 'Q.U.' in 'awkward'!"

"I'm sorry," I said, feeling unnerved.

"Why don't you look up the words you don't know in a dictionary?"

"Because," said I truthfully, "I don't know that I don't know them."

He hadn't thought of that one.

He then started putting me through my paces and asking me a few brutes like "fuchsia" and "dahlia", and "embarrassed" (which I don't believe I've got right now), and I became irritated and said he needn't sit there trying to think of difficult ones, because I didn't know the simple ones either, as he'd soon find out if he tried me on a few. Suddenly he realized it.

"Do try to do better," he said.

I wanted to, but it was difficult. He said that the story needed gingering up, and we went through it inch by inch. He showed me where I lost points or gained them, and he cut out much of my verbosity (the amateur's staggering fault). "Stop using colons," he suggested, "and for Pete's sake leave off those exclamation marks! They're a disease with you."

I suppose if I hadn't been so anxious to learn, I would have slain him then and there, but I took my story back, and a second plot, and home I went rather *piano*. I hadn't failed completely, but that was about all that one could say. The second plot was a beast, too. All about a village idiot who wasn't really one, but married a girl in an interesting condition because he loved her and wanted to help her through a difficult time. I could see just nothing in it.

The snag was that, as yet, I did not know a plot when I saw one.

However, the next week, the story was improved so much that it was to be offered to the *Premier Magazine* from my address, and of course as that was the case, I had to pay the postage both ways. I had imagined we should share in this as we were sharing in profits, and it worried me, because I couldn't expect the gun money to last for ever, and I knew it. If the postage became really big I'd have to give up the extra twopence on

bread or coffee at Lyons', and reduce my lunch money that way to good old stew and Norfolk with no titivations. But of course we were bound to sell something, the collaborator was far too knowledgeable to drop bricks.

The story about the ambitious hunchback came back within the week, which was shattering. When I told the collaborator he was staggered, and said that it was up to their standard and what the hell did they want? It returned with the same speed from the *Red*, the *Royal*, the *Argosy*, the *Novel* and the *Grand*, until any thud in my letter box told me that it was that infernal hunchback come home again.

Unfortunately within the first six weeks we had a couple of dozen stories all doing the same thing, and this meant that not one penny of the gun money had been reimbursed, but a great deal was being taken out of it; in fact it was beginning to look definitely thin. What was even worse was that his other woman collaborator had found out what he was doing on Mondays and Thursdays, and had started kicking up a fuss.

"Women are always the devil," said he.

At the end of three months we were still without a sale (and I with a season ticket that needed renewal). I had learnt a lot, and was learning a good deal more, but I was finding my hopes pretty well dashed. In vain did I wander down Fleet Street foot-slogging it back to the Great Eastern Railway, and taking a look at the gallant commissionaires who hoof young writers out with such diligence. Those portals seemed to be barred for ever.

Then Berners put a ladies' orchestra on the balcony to play the Indian Love Lyrics and such, which didn't help overmuch with our bi-weekly chats. We didn't want to change our meeting place; we felt that it meant more than that, but we were getting depressed.

Suddenly he thought that he had discovered the trouble.

"It's all my fault, I'm such a fool," said he. "I'm trying to compete with myself, offering two stories of just the same type to a magazine that can obviously only take one of a kind a month, and will fall for the writer with a name. We shall have to change the style."

I hoped very much that this would succeed, but either he found it difficult to change his style, or the editors rumbled something, anyhow we never sold a thing.

Then he got to like me.

He was a very nice man, if a little odd, and he always called me Enkosikaas because he said that Ursula was such a bibful, though I could not see that he had gained very much by the change. Enkosikaas became Honey Bear, and when the Bear part of it started getting lost by the way I began to get nervous.

I did not intend to marry again, although I did intend to become a writer, and now here was the collaborator, whom I was dying to keep in with, talking about getting a Swiss divorce (whatever that might be. I never did gather how many wives he had, nor what his commitments of the moment were), which boded ill, I felt.

The thing to do was to keep him off the point until we had got the career started, and I admit that my optimism in this direction was fading. Hope flashed suddenly round a corner.

We had a story on the go called *The Phantom Third*, and it was sent to Messrs. Arthur Pearson's in Henrietta Street, Strand. I got a letter back one morning, asking if I would call and see a certain Mr. Lamburn about it. Naturally I went to London next morning on wings, met the collaborator glowingly, holding out the letter. As yet we did not know which magazine was interested

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in the story, but he thought that it was probably *Pearson's Magazine*, with which he had had a lot of previous success.

He said that I must go and interview the editor, he would wait for me in a coffee shop in the Strand, and I must be careful not to put my foot into it, but come back and tell him all about it before I said anything definite.

I wanted to get inside an editorial office, but was alarmed that I should make a prize idiot of myself. I had no idea of the price of a short story, and in this my collaborator refused to help me.

"You'll be all right," said he.

So off up Bedford Street I went, slackening a bit as I turned with horror into Henrietta Street, and stopping at number eighteen. A commissionaire, whom later I was to know very well indeed, cocked a wary eye at me. "Well?" he said.

"I want to see a Mr. Lamburn."

"What name?"

"Miss Bloom," and I proffered the letter. The commissionaire evidently suspected me, read it, gave it back to me, then rang up some unknown and probably terrifying quantity above. "Go on up," he said, with a jerk of his head, "first floor, the door on the left."

Up I went with my heart making funny noises. I passed the waiting-room where people waited by the hour. I climbed the stairs in a mixture of terror and joy, I tapped on the mahogany door marked 'Mr. F. Lamburn.'

"Come in!" said a pleasant voice.

I was *in!*

I was the other side of the impenetrable forest of my youth; six months since I'd started tackling it, and the gun money was running out, but I'd got in at last. I prayed that it might not be an ogre. It wasn't an ogre. Quiet, dignified, and very sincere, Mr. Lamburn was

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sitting there with my story before him on his desk. Almost immediately he disillusioned me on the point of a possible purchase; he did *not* want to buy the story. That was horrible. The gun money had already had to renew one season ticket, and yet a third was on my horizon. What should I do? Mr. Lamburn asked me some questions.

“Why is it a collaboration?” he asked.

“Because I can’t write plots.”

“Why not?”

I told him my story; for years I had struggled to be a writer and it didn’t come off, now I was trying to learn something through a collaboration.

“Who did the plot, and who did the writing?”

“I wrote it. I can’t do a plot—yet.”

I must have been deadly earnest because he accepted me at my word; I had never met an editor before and was most impressed by his understanding of the situation. “What other work have you done?”

“I’ve sold several words for songs.”

“So you write verses? Please let me see some, but they must be brief; not morbid or religious.”

I thanked him and indicated the manuscript on his desk. “What do I do about that?”

He handed it to me. “This won’t do, and you must tell your collaborator that it won’t do. But you can write and if only you’ll stick to it you’ll get on.”

In the doorway I said “I shall stick it, you know.” I must have looked very young and silly, but still desperately purposeful.

“We’ll see about that,” he said, “and anyway send me those verses, and try a story *yourself*. You can do it, you know.”

As the door shut on him I knew that I *was* going to be a writer. If you want anything badly enough, life gives it to you. That is, if you are prepared to back it with every ounce of energy that you’ve got. I went

along the corridor. I had seen an editor—a *real* one! A small man bounced out of a door marked *Editor* and into another marked *Gentlemen*. I had seen another editor!

I went down the tired old stairs on air; the wings of a dove weren't in it!

But of course from those blissful heights one is almost bound to descend into the depths again. Thrilled beyond measure as I passed the waiting-room where the poor mutts still sat waiting (I prayed that they would mistake me for some famous authoress, who had the *entrée*, so to speak, to all the private apartments above), I suddenly remembered my collaborator who was sitting in a Strand A.B.C. drinking coffee till my return.

Oh Lord! thought I.

I had to go back and break it to the unfortunate man that his plots were N.B.G. and that Mr. Lamburn had asked for a story of mine with my name alone on it, and no Cashel Thunder attachment. When I came to consider this, it wasn't so funny.

As I went down Bedford Street I tried to think of a nice way of telling him, and the nearer I got to that hateful A.B.C. the more I shirked the issue. There he was sitting waiting for me, and in I went, and sat down.

"Well?" said he.

"It was for *Pearson's Weekly*."

"Good heavens! I never thought of that awful little rag. What did they offer?"

"They didn't."

"You don't mean that they had the impertinence to send for you to tell you that they didn't want it?"

"Not exactly," and then to give myself a little Dutch courage even if it did mean drawing on yet more of the gun money, "I think I'd like some coffee, if you don't mind."

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Then I had to explain.

I have got to say that he was awfully nice about it, which must have been difficult. He said that it was a good idea, and I must send Mr. Lamburn a manuscript straight away. And if I felt that I could do the stories myself, then for goodness' sake get on with it and have a shot, because he didn't want to stand in my way.

He made me feel the most loathsome cad, although when I came to analyse it after and think about it, I hadn't really done anything caddish. He could not have been more charming, but of course he must have known that it was the thin end of the wedge, and that if I managed to sell work under my own name, then the collaboration must be broken up.

He had taught me a lot.

He taught me to keep notes of every story I ever read, and how to "twist" a plot. But he never taught me how to spell.

That evening he came all the way to Liverpool Street to see me off, and he had never done it before. Somehow when I left him standing there, I felt terribly sad.

CHAPTER THREE

To write for love, my friends thought funny.
Well, now my pen starts making money!

I kept by me volumes of verse which I wrote for fun, and to which I was always adding. My collaborator had taught me how to read a magazine, which, until now, I had not known, though naturally I thought I was rather clever at it. I bought a couple of copies of *Pearson's Weekly*, studied the sort of thing they published and picked out six poems from my book. There was a rather dreadful thing about a snowdrop (but people like verses about flowers), a most encouraging one with dash, called *Rome was not built in a day*, and four similar effusions full of buck and vim. Five were bought by return of post at half-a-guinea a time. Ye gods! thought I. I was just saved by a short head, because the gun money was really getting near to a very sticky end. I hardly dared look inside the box these days, and now for the first time I was actually able to put something back and reinforce depleting funds.

Also now I could call in at Messrs. Arthur Pearson's offices, which was sheer joy; how great a joy, I very much doubt if the occupants there ever knew. I have never got over the thrill. I pranced past the commissionaire and inside I went. The shabby, rather sordid stairs wafted me to Heaven, the congested little waiting-room with its current copies liberally stamped *Not to be taken away* (which just shows what most waiting folks did), was Nirvana. It is quite true that every other door in Fleet Street was hermetically sealed to me, but this one was open. Well, perhaps not completely open, but I believed that later it would be; for the moment it was definitely ajar!

Three stories were discussed with me, written and bought at three guineas a time. The funds were up! For the very first time I celebrated with a ninepenny lunch, and it might have been champagne for all the kick that I got out of it. Fame lay ahead of me, I was convinced. Baroness Orczy, Marjorie Bowen, Ethel M. Dell, and all of them *me*. In the future, of course, but not too far away, and definitely *me*.

I still went to Berners and worked out a story a week with Mahammed (the collaborator), but the wretched things stuck in spite of all the energy that I put into them. What was worse, we never did sell a single one of them. He was so good about it, it was maddening, because this man had taught me more than anyone else in the world, and I could never be grateful enough to him (and Colonel B. of course, who found him for me), but I was unable to repay my gratitude by so much as a solitary sale.

"You know," said Mahammed, "for every editor you meet, you ought to get an introduction to another one. That's important."

I followed his advice faithfully. I've met too many people who ask for advice and then push it aside because it isn't the kind they fancy for themselves. Already I knew one editor, one blessed editor, and he was very kind, but one wasn't good enough. Summoning all my courage and going, I am sure, very red in the face, I asked him for an introduction when next I saw him. He looked grave, then said that he thought I ought to be able to do work for *Tit-Bits* and the *Pictorial*, both two-penny weeklies in the same field of action. He gave me introductions to Leonard Crocombe and Hessel Tiltman, who were the editors. I had never had a written introduction to anybody in the world before, and did not know what on earth I did with them, so back to Berners Hotel I trotted for a little advice.

"You just go along with them," said my collaborator.

He was at that time busily looking for copy, and he used to do the most surprising things in the quest. He would buy a couple of stalls for a show, and leave one at a little newsagent's where he dealt, with instructions for them to give it to some "interesting-looking person." Then he'd slip into the show and start up a conversation, finally revealing that he was the donor of the ticket, and taking him on to a meal. One night, however, the little newsagent went too far, for he found himself sitting beside a coal-black mammy!

He was for ever being flung out of his flat, and getting into a new one and being flung out of that in turn, because of the curious people he would cultivate in his eternal search for copy, and the awful scenes that some of them made. I, who had always led the most orderly life, found this sort of thing perplexing, if not a trifle unnerving. I have known him turn up at Berners, with his entire worldly goods stacked on the taxi outside, and with (for the moment) no definite abode niched, or place to go to. Did it make him turn a hair? Oh no! He didn't even worry himself. He would say that London was a large place and there was bound to be somewhere for him, in which surmise he was always proved to be right.

I liked him. He was very kind to me, and it worried me that nothing we did together sold. He said that if we got married, that would be the biggest sell of all, but I thought it might be too much of a one for me. No, said I, I want to be an authoress, nothing more, nothing less.

He wrote long letters to me daily. At first I thought that they were about the plots for stories, then I came to the conclusion that they were all about nothing. They were either intensely clever, or quite mad, and I don't believe I have ever found out which. I would arrive home to find one saying:

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Have you seen the red hunter? His cloak
was brilliant with fire yesterday, and I
thought he whispered Enkosikaas as he
fluttered past me.

Mahammed.

If you can get the meaning, I can't. Once, after a particularly fruity letter, I wrote asking for an explanation, and he sent me back a postcard:

Enkosikaas. What a little goat
you are! Mahammed.

P.S. I like goats.

So I didn't try to seek explanations again, because the maid, who brought it up to me in bed, had obviously read it, judging by the peculiar look on her face, and she must have thought that I was up to no good. And had Master Mahammed ever rumbled that he would have played up to the joke, and I should probably have had to leave the place in a hurry.

One pleasant morning I took my introduction to Hessel Tiltman down Fleet Street to the Fleetway House, which was awe-inspiring. The commissionaire halted me just inside the hall, and passed me along to a second lordly creature who wafted me into the waiting-room, replete with Lord Northcliffe's picture, so that I felt I ought to take off my hat, or stand to attention, or do something respectful. The commissionaire indicated a small but alarming desk, and a form which had to be filled up whilst a disdainful-looking page took up sentry-go beside me. I put Ursula Bloom where it said "business", and "about stories" where it said "name", and mercifully "Mr. Tiltman" where it directed "To see". Off went the page, and I, following him, was halted by the commissionaire, who I felt sure didn't like me.

"You must wait and see if Mr. Tiltman can see you," said he, obviously recognizing me as a makee-learn!

"Oh yes," I replied, feeling like a naughty child.

Back I went and sat down on an uncomfortable chair (the comfortable ones were already occupied by the old hands). My feet wouldn't reach the ground, and I swung them feeling rather young and daft. I hadn't the faintest idea what I was going to say to Mr. Tiltman, even if he would see me, which now appeared to be doubtful, in fact at the moment I was beginning to pray that he wouldn't see me, and let me escape. Shyness has always been my curse. I looked for inspiration to Lord Northcliffe, fly-spotted and fading. Had he ever felt shy too? Undoubtedly not!

A girl came in and went up to a young man with a portfolio. "Hello?" she said. "She sent me down; what have you got there?" He opened the portfolio brazenly on the table (he wasn't a bit shy), and he displayed several more-or-less naked ladies, as though he and the girl were quite alone in the room. They went into the matter of the pictures in embarrassing detail. "I don't like her legs," said the girl, "not enough of them." "You don't want a nude by any chance?" "Lord no, not actually nude, but suggesting something flimsy." "Right," said he, "I'll wash out her bath robe, and put her into two pennyworth of tulle, that ought to do the trick!"

At this juncture a pimply young man arrived, and told a fat woman in the corner that the editor was busy, it being press day, but could he do anything for her? The fat lady said that he couldn't, snappily enough, and swept out on him. I sat there with my eyes popping.

Presently my page returned. "He'll see you," he said. "Step this way, please."

With alacrity I stepped into the lift, with about six others, each with an attendant page, and up we went, and still up, and then some!

"This way," said the page brightly. He went on ahead of me at incredible speed, I had to run round the corners in the most ignominious fashion, only praying

he did not realize to what depths I had to descend to keep pace with him. All the doors had numbers, not names, save those marked *Ladies* and *Gents*. Presently he stopped, rapped sharply on a door, and in I went, puffed for breath. It wasn't Mr. Tiltman at all, it was a couple of girls typing, one of whom looked up and said, "He won't be a minute, would you care to see the current number?"

I sat down, now quite horrified. The first flush of enthusiasm had died in that waiting-room. Mr. Tiltman might easily be terrifying. Before I had much time to collect my thoughts the door opened, and a pleasant voice said "Come along in." It wasn't like an office, but a nice sitting-room with flowers on the light wood desk, and books. Mr. Tiltman was young, not a bit what I had expected, and *not* fierce. "So Mr. Lamburn sent you along," said he, "what can you do?"

The dreadful part was that I could do nothing, and knew it. It was like that abominable game of my childhood, 'Mother Magee's dead, How did she die?' I said that I could write verses, which for the moment was the only thing that I was sure of, little knowing that all beginners think they can write verses, and usually can't. I thought that he did not appear to be impressed by this.

"What about stories?" he asked.

Then I told about the collaborator, and my years of effort to get where I was on the fringe of the Fleetway House, and trying desperately to get some sort of permanent landing place on Mr. Tiltman's hearthrug. He did not laugh once. I think that he knew how anxious I was to succeed, and he suggested that I sent some work along, on the principle of 'if-at-first-you-don't-succeed-try-try-again'. When I left I had the feeling that anything I sent in would have his personal consideration, and that he would give me any constructive criticism that he could.

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I then went along to Messrs. George Newnes. This was less ormolu; a decrepit little commissionaire, who had the merit of being extremely kind, took me up in what must have been the shakiest lift in London. He landed me on an uncompromising floor, with a door at the end marked:

TIT-BITS GENERAL.

"Along there, miss," said he, and along I went!

In *Tit-Bits General*, a secretary was typing hard, whilst a girl pasted cuttings into a book (there was a dreadful smell of paste everywhere), and an office boy boiled milk on the gas ring in the corner. They greeted me amiably, as an old friend, and the secretary went along to see if Mr. Crocombe was busy, and came back saying it would be all right, and took me along to the holy of holies.

Now my entire future depended on three men. It sounds idiotic, but it was true; had these three men just turned me down then and there, I should never be a writer, and I knew it. Life does not offer you its opportunities twice; somebody once told me 'Hang on to her forelock, because opportunity is bald at the back.' Ye gods, how I was holding on! Mr. Crocombe asked to see stories, he was very helpful and constructive in his advice, and I went from him to my sevenpenny lunch, and later on to my collaborator, on wings.

The first lot of stories to the new markets came back at disappointing speed. Then Mr. Crocombe sent for me. "Look here," he said, "your bother is that your words are not descriptive enough. You splash them about with very little idea of their true value."

I hadn't the vaguest notion what he meant, and was depressed, which he must have seen.

"You'll do it in time," said he; "now don't get down in the mouth about it, come on out and have some lunch."

It's odd, but it had never occurred to me that one of

the great men would ever ask me out. I, the merest hanger-on, pathetically toiling with my *Blick*, and getting very little way indeed. For once I did not have to disburse an unwilling sevenpence, but was taken to the Strand Palace Hotel. Mr. Crocombe must have had some idea of my poor little mind, and the hunger in it to write, for he showed me editors walking about the lounge. Herbert Shaw of the *Happy*, Charles Vivian of the *Novel*, Reeves Shaw of the *Strand*, F. E. Baily of the *Royal*. Not men to me, but gods! I returned to Frinton completely drunk with joy.

"I don't understand you," said one of my friends there, "you're attractive, you've got an income, you could have the very dickens of a good time, and what do you do? Go smelling around a party of stuffy editors, and what for? As though anyone ever wanted to be a writer! What do you think you're going to get out of it?"

I didn't know.

But I did know that for me the world that began at Henrietta Street, and reached up to Ave Maria Lane, comprised *my* world, and I'd rather starve in it than feast in the West End. I just *wanted* to be a writer.

The gun money was no longer running out on me; I had turned that corner and it was being reimbursed. *Tit-Bits*, buying three short stories, paid me nineteen guineas, and when I saw the cheque, I thought they must have made a staggering mistake. On the strength of it, surely it was time to buy myself something? So I bought a hat. It was a frightful black hat, with imitation ospreys round it, and I was so excited that I insisted on putting it on, and carrying my original hat away in a bag. Walking out of the Leicester Square shop in the new one, a passing male immediately pinched me in a soft spot—to my indignation—so it shows what I looked like in my new hat!

As time progressed, I lunched out occasionally, but

this was not quite the save that I had originally thought it to be, because I had to ask the people back, which was a heavy drag on my resources. My collaborator had put me wise to the fact that more work was sold over the lunch table than anywhere else, and it would be an unwise policy to restrict operations there. The old days of sevenpennyworth at Lyons' were slipping away from me; I had got round my first, most difficult, corner.

I managed to earn seventy pounds in the second six months of my first year, but as far as eye could see, there was absolutely no guarantee that I should earn seven-pence in the next one. Also I was hindered by the difficulties at Poona.

It is far easier to start a career when you are unmarried; I had heavy responsibilities; either the baby got ill, or the maids gave notice, or something happened as a barrier between myself and my job. I did most of my reading in the train to be sure of no interruptions, but at Poona I had every interruption in the world. It might all be experience, but it galled.

I had no study of my own, feeling it sentimentally wrong to employ my late husband's study for a pursuit of which he would have disapproved. No, said I, I'll play fair. So I worked in the dining-room, a horrid little room with a dreadful black marble mantelpiece, and the window seat that I had put up myself (carpentry is not my particular talent), and had had to cover with lumpy frills to hide my awful handiwork.

What happened in the dining-room? As soon as I and my Blick settled down to it, the maid returned to put away the silver, made a few chatty comments and left again. I typed on madly against the moment that the baby was brought in to kiss his mamma goodbye before going out tata's! This over, I settled in once more, to be interrupted by (*a*) the cook, saying that if we wanted sausages for lunch she'd like to know what we intended

doing about it, because they hadn't come, (b) the telephone, which everybody else appeared to be incapable of answering, (c) the window cleaner, a superior ex-gentleman's gentleman, with a boundless tide of chatter, (d) gay callers who, on hearing the typewriter, would come bounding in, with " 'Ello, 'Ello, At it ag'in?" thinking this very funny.

But the stories sold; one in about eight went off my hands, just enough to hold my head above water. I had failed to go down with the guns.

Also I started a little regular job with *Home Chat*. Mr. Tiltman had wafted me into that office to meet my first woman editor, and naturally I refrained from mentioning the spurious silver jam spoon which I still carted everywhere with me. Elsie Cooper found that I could write verse, and she settled me down on *Poetiquette*. *Poetiquette* consisted of couplets, each amusing, and each conveying a gentle but substantial hint on politeness.

The perfect gent knows it's a sin
To tuck his napkin 'neath his chin.

A heinous friend I had called Nelly,
She used a spoon when eating jelly.

A guest who came to sup, did sneeze,
And, to our horror, drowned the cheese!

I would search up etiquette hints, and then put them into couplets at half-a-crown a time, and this pleasant little ten shillings a week lasted me for over a year. It wasn't easy; couplets never are; you have no words to play about with, and *must* get your meaning over tersely.

I was working on brief little articles for Mr. Lamburn, and in another paper I had a weekly job of writing six questions and answers to give pep to the Aunt Emily page. Aunt Emily was a dreary woman (in reality a young man) and the replies were to enquiries of a dullish nature. Every week dotted about her page, were a few good old fruity ones, and these were allotted to me.

I had to keep them moderately within the bounds of

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respectability, though tantalizingly close enough to the margin to set rude readers' mouths watering!

When I got this job I thought that it was just too easy, and seeing that it represented two guineas a week to me, was a miracle. But of course on any regular work of that kind within a few weeks you find that there isn't enough fruitiness in the world to go round. Supply and demand don't balance up. The good old standards were *Married Man's Girl, Meeting the Old Love again, Deathbed Promises, His wife made mischief, We aren't the same faith*, and of course the eternal and very exciting one, *In love with an Indian student*, which is always bound to set the chops licking.

Landing this job, I thought I was in clover; six months later I thought I was in hell. The thing went everywhere with me and haunted me. The editor got to the stage of complaining that he had had this particular one so often before, but truly, there was not enough to go round. In the end I went down on it—Indian student and all!

As yet the big newspaper doors were closed to me, and looked like staying closed. I could of course peep inside, but nothing more. I could hear their presses humming, but never thought I should ever be near them. Everything comes to him who waits—pushfully!

I was fiddling about on the back doorstep of the two-penny weeklies, but they have constituted the stepping stone to fame for nearly all the great writers of both sexes. And they were reimbursing me. All jobs were experience, and experience was my password.

I had had my name on the cover of the *Pictorial*, seeing it at Frinton station looking up at me from the cover, and getting far more kick out of it than I ever did when the *Sunday Pic.* put my picture on to every 'bus in London some years later.

Whilst I still dithered about, I was given the job of

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"Ruth". I had an introduction to an editor who dealt in sensational magazines, and who wanted something of a semi-serial nature to fill the back page of a fortnightly 'long complete'. I thought of Ruth.

Ruth was a dreadful young woman, who wrote letters home from London. Entirely and distressingly innocent, she had arrived in the metropolis and was the butt of every amorous male, but remained adamantly virginal. She had the most astounding adventures with something of everything. She was kidnapped by a conjuror, almost seduced by film stars on the set (never quite of course; that was ruled out as being bad for the film, and definitely for our public). She was decoyed into sloops by wicked sailors, millionaires lured her into the Ritz, but she always nipped out by the grill-room entrance before anything much could happen! She went for a day to the seaside and God knows what happened with the palmist on the pier! Could I kill that girl? No. She was on my conscience for about four years, twenty-six adventures a year, and executed in batches of six at a time, after which I would sit back and take in a deep breath, until another note would come:

We're running a bit short of Ruths again!

Then back I went to her. There was *Ruth and the Rajah*; *Ruth and the Haunted Room* (that was a fruity one!); *Ruth cannot be bought for gold*, etc. I don't remember what I did with her in the long run, because I grew so deadly tired of her. I think she must have had her eyes opened, or somebody as my cook said "took advantage of her," whatever that may mean.

By now I knew most of the editors of the twopenny magazines, and some of the sixpennies and shillings. Then I met Wyatt Tilby, who lived at Frinton. We travelled to and fro in the train sometimes.

He said, "If you're going to live, my girl, you'll have to write a novel."

CHAPTER FOUR

A novel other efforts caps,
It's eighty thou; and thirty chaps!

THE novel terrified me. My difficulty had always been to make my work longer; the shortest of short stories I could manage fairly easily now, but when they had to be eked out, I failed badly. And, just as I was contemplating what appeared to me to be a super-human task, my kind friends the Dumas' left the neighbourhood and foreclosed on the Blick.

This awful blow was dealt to me one night on my return from London, by my brother. "I had to hand it over to them," he said, "after all, it *is* their machine."

"You mean to tell me that I haven't got a typewriter?"

"I'm afraid it looks rather like it."

I burst into tears. I had brought down a lot of work with me, and could not think what to do next about it. I realized that a decent typewriter would mean a very serious outlay, and had no idea where I could possibly turn to for one to cope with the immediate work in hand. I have one sterling quality, and at this, the outset of the career, I did want editors to realize it. I am punctual. Never at any time in my life have I been late on the delivery of a manuscript, and this even when it was to the matter of minutes. Only once was I late for the recording of a broadcast. I was in a very nasty car accident at the top of Baker Street, and when I got to Broadcasting House, I was two minutes over time. The woman who received me was most unpleasant.

"I know what writers are," said she.

"I'm not," I told her, and by then I had a reputation about which she ought to have known.

"Look at the time!" she said significantly.

"I am two minutes late, and have been in a car accident which would have sent most women home to bed," I told her.

The recording was a failure, it was the worst I ever did, not on account of the accident, but because I was so utterly furious with the woman.

I wasn't going to be late on tomorrow's work if I could help it.

However, there is a providence which watches over me. A friend dropped in hopefully for a drink. He was a nice man, large, mother's darling, and harbouring the erroneous belief that he just oozed brains. I thought we had quarrelled, because a week before when in the train he had told me it was his birthday and had asked me to guess his age, in the maddening way that people will. I, taking off about ten years for luck, hazarded forty-five as being a safe bet. He was twenty-six! After that I never expected he would speak to me again, but he wasn't that sort of a man; in came old Bill, and he knew of a typewriter.

He had a friend who ran an estate office and possessed three Remingtons. If I liked, old Bill would go round and knock up his friend here and now. It being after eleven, I begged him to do nothing so silly, but old Bill had got the bit between his teeth.

"He ought to be glad to do it for a famous authoress," said old Bill.

"But I'm not."

Nothing would stop Bill and out he plunged into the night, bent on his errand of mercy and very serious about it indeed. My brother and I sat up, and old Bill seemed to have been gone for hours; I could imagine him in furious argument with the estate agent, and was horrified that the agent would think that this had been

my idea, and that I had persuaded old Bill to go along, when nothing had been further from my thoughts.

I kept on saying "We oughtn't to have let him go." An hour later we heard him on the paved walk, puffing and blowing and carrying all before him in the shape of an office Remington with no cover, and weighing about a ton!

"Here we are," said old Bill cheerfully, "you can have it for a week, but he wants it back on Monday."

Although the Remington helped me through the next week, it was only too obvious that I had got to buy myself a proper machine, something secondhand and hire purchase if I could, and I had not the faintest idea where to turn. A girl in *Tit-Bits* office suggested John Barker's, and went along to choose a re-conditioned one for me, selecting one at nine pounds, which I thought tremendous. But that typewriter earned its cost; it had a grand print, and although, as one editor pathetically put it, it couldn't spell, it did produce a decent-looking page.

But it was steady uphill work! For one acceptance six would return. I was too hurried; excitement carried me along too fast. Articles were easier, I found, because argument has always appealed to me, and I'm interested in it. There were moments when I despaired, moments when I got over the despair, gritted my teeth and went back, moments when I wanted to slap editors, others when I ought to have slapped myself!

The *True Story* was a joy. In it I was providing all my friends' personal and very private life stories as they might have been written by themselves. *Married to a Bluebeard; My husband kept this from me; My wife was marble*, etc. After I had sold a few, I managed to get the firm interested in a glowing serial based entirely on fact and called *The Revelations of a Country Rectory*. I had used my personal experiences in my fairly lively

parental rectory, and very good reading (if you like that sort of reading) it had made.

The Revelations looked like twenty solid pounds and thrilled me. The paper had the complete copy, and had advertised them to start next month, and I had many friends (including old Bill) who had ordered copies, and when they found that the Revelations weren't there, abused me soundly, accusing me of letting them down. It seemed to me that if anyone was being let down, that person was myself, and I wrote in a panic to the editor, one Gwen Gilligan.

No answer.

I wrote again, and tersely, but was easily matched in terseness. The horrible part was that (a) I had no copy of my valuable contribution to English literature, and (b) I had already treated myself to a few oddments on the strength of the twenty pounds that I anticipated from the sale. I was now really very worried.

I happened to lunch with Leonard Crocombe that week, and on hearing my story he was determined to see justice done. He said that I couldn't possibly let it slip like that, I must handle the situation properly; we'd go round to the office together.

The last thing that I wanted to do was to go and have a row at the *True Story* offices, but he was quite determined; we got into a taxi, and, arriving there, asked to see Gwen Gilligan. They said she wasn't in. We said we'd wait. Half-an-hour later we were still waiting, I most nervously. Presently the office boy said that he'd go up and enquire again, and we followed him upstairs. On the first floor were the offices all right, and a very charming girl appeared and said that Miss Gilligan had been delayed, could she help? We had already had to fill in a piece of paper explaining what we had come about, so now Leonard Crocombe launched himself out; he said that the least the firm could do was to return the manuscript.

"But, of course," said the girl, obviously very shocked that this could have happened. "I'll explain to Miss Gilligan the moment that she comes in."

Mr. Crocombe said we would wait, which appeared to shatter the secretary; she said that she would try to get in touch with Miss Gilligan and disappeared into an inner room, returning later, very red in the face, to say that Miss Gilligan had gone down to Hurlingham for the afternoon.

This seemed to be the end. We went.

For several months we had no idea that the very nice girl had in truth been Miss Gilligan herself, who, having smelt a rat, had thought it wiser to pretend to be her own secretary, because she simply dare not admit to being herself. Leonard Crocombe had been most helpful, but of course the tragedy was there for all to see; the manuscript was missing.

Although I did not realize it at the time, the *Revelations of a Country Rector* were a definite stepping-stone to better things.

Mahommed (although the collaboration was so to speak disbanded) still hung on the fringe of all my literary efforts, and now insisted that I got down to the novel that Wyatt Tilby had spoken of. He vetted five plots, marked the one which he considered to be the most likely, and told me to get on with it.

Getting on with it was not easy.

The last thing that I ever wanted to do was to write a novel; my seven passionate sex novels, all in the Whitchurch waste-paper basket, had been paltry little thirty-thousand worders, now here was I staring dismally at eighty-thousand words, which looked like Doomsday Book to me! Also I had got to continue with journalism and keep my head above water in the field that so far I had broken into, and not lose what I had already made in an effort to expand my endeavours.

"It's going to be a hard job," I told Mahommed.

"Don't you think everybody's first novel is a hard job?" he enquired.

I wrote the first three chapters very much on the crest of the wave, but at the end of forty pages I discovered that three hundred such would be next to impossible, and wilted considerably. I recalled the collaborated stories which had been written but which had never sold. Could anything be more hideous than to think of the energy I would have to pour into my novel; then what worse tragedy than to have it, like the others, left on my hands?

Of course the moment this idea had occurred to me I was sunk. Two more lagging chapters when the scene of the fun had moved out of the convent and into Paris, sophisticated but quite unreal, had proved to me the enormity of eighty-thousand words.

"No, you can't skimp them, Enkosikaas, what a little ass you are!" said Mahammed with truth.

The five chapters sat on my bureau with my interest flagging very much. One day travelling down in the train with Wyatt Tilby, then editor of *The Outlook*, I talked about it. He was in a *piano* mood. Amongst his quiet hobbies was reading for a famous firm whom he had advised some months previously not to take a manuscript entitled *Tell England*; another firm had produced it, and although his firm hadn't told England, it had told Wyatt Tilby quite a lot.

I discussed novels brightly, with the profound earnestness of the very young, and Wyatt Tilby offered to read my five chapters and see if they were worth finishing. I know I gave him the manuscript in the good old horse 'bus which Messrs. Race and Scott plied to and from Frinton station, and I believe still do. Somebody treated me to sixpennyworth in it; I should never have been so extravagant myself.

I quite forgot that Wyatt Tilby had got the manuscript until some time later he said, "I'd finish the book.

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It's all right," and he then told me the firm to whom to offer it. They happened to be the very people with whom I had had the *contretemps* over the *Revelations of a Country Rectory*.

"Oh, I couldn't possibly offer it to them," said I, "they might remember me."

"Well, make them remember you. They lost the manuscript, didn't they? They owe you something surely; they'll take the book."

With immense labour I finished it. At moments I thought it an inspired work, at others I thought it drivel, in which estimate of course I was far more accurate. I typed it out, never corrected a line of it, believing correction to be unnecessary (which goes to show that I had no idea what I was doing), then I dispatched it, without any very great hopes.

So far my biggest success had been with articles and my weekly job of six fruity questions and answers. I laid little store by the novel. Deadly silence greeted it.

For months nothing happened at all, then one day Wyatt Tilby said, "By the bye, have you sold your novel yet?" and I told him it was just sitting there. "Stir it up," said he, so I returned to my typewriter and wrote a tactful letter:

Dear Sirs,

Re my novel *The Great Beginning* dispatched to you
on the—

only to find that I had no recollection of the date, or note of it, so had to start again:

Dear Sirs,

Re the novel *The Great Beginning* which I sent to you last March, I should be glad to know if you have come to any decision.

Yours truly.

This did as much as the first note had done, which was damn-all! I became annoyed and wrote acidly, but

I might have saved myself the trouble, so, getting really angry, I wrote to the effect that as they had already lost one manuscript of mine, I'd thank them not to make it two.

I felt brave posting that; it is never wise to try bullying a firm, and I had a nasty idea that I might find the doors shut fast against me if I didn't watch out.

Silence! That was all. Defeating silence!

A month later I woke one morning to find my small son beside me in bed looking peculiar. He had come out in spots. Ten days previously his Grandma (always a perverse old lady) had treated him to the panto. This she had done reluctantly, saying that she disliked children going to public places because "they always caught something". I had laughed at it. Well, he *had* caught something, and wasn't I going to catch it too when I rang up and told darling Grandma what had happened!

He was as red as a raspberry with measles.

It took me a little time to get the situation well in hand, after which I read my letters. The publishing firm enclosed a contract for my novel, offering me twenty-five pounds down on day of publication and right of refusal for my next three novels. There was a long string of figures dealing with royalties, and would I please sign on the dotted line?

I stared at that letter for one whole minute before I believed that it was true, then up I sprang. I shot into the dining-room and did a spirited *pas seul*. I dashed into my brother's bedroom, told him that our fortunes were now made, and then to the telephone to ring up the doctor.

"The baby's got measles, and I've sold a book," I gasped.

I went to see the publishing firm. I doubt if I ever felt the ground beneath me as I went up Ludgate Hill,

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it wasn't Ludgate Hill anyway, it was highway to Heaven, and I had become a beatific person drunk on air. I asked to see the man who had sent me the contract.

"What's your business?" asked the suspiciously-minded girl at the pigeon hole; a girl with a quiff, and a lot of false nasturtiums at her bosom.

"It's about a novel that they want to buy," and for a moment an awful agony came over me that they might have repented at the last moment, and not want it after all. They certainly had repented over the *Revelations of a Country Rectory*, so this might go the same way. What then? She was a very dull girl, she did not realize that in my present state of mind she represented St. Peter at the gate.

"Go on up," said she wearily.

Another of those soiled stone staircases, and a man who really wasn't interested. "You just sign there," said he.

I signed.

This was fame! I saw the novel as a *Viper of Milan*, an *If Winter Comes*—a best seller. I and my miserable little contract, which was the passport to a brave new world, just stood there dithering.

"That's all," said he, "I'll send the proofs along; you won't hold them up, will you?"

"Certainly not," I promised. But what did I do with proofs? I couldn't spell. I knew nothing of punctuation. I remembered my father going through his proofs, and what he had been doing to them I wouldn't know. How in the world to get out of this difficulty I could not think for the moment, but I'd do it somehow. Small things like proofs don't bar the way to the sweet and blessed country beyond.

The firm would send me a copy of the contract, they said, and I walked out into my new world, feeling about as drunk on air as it is possible to be.

This was no longer a drab city, it was my world. I walked down Fleet Street for the sheer joy of it. I could look the men and women in the face, for had I not had a book taken? Three more too. *Three more!*

I went to George Newnes, and, because I had to tell someone, I told Leonard Crocombe, who was thrilled. All along he had said that I would do well and it seemed that I looked like living up to that.

Frinton of course wasn't interested. They had argued that I couldn't do it, and to find that I had now got a contract was annoying to them. I went to my best friend, a rather fast young woman, who I had hoped had my interest at heart; all she said was "Oh, do shut up about your beastly book! I really don't care two damns if you *have* sold it. I'm in a hole. My husband's found out about the Brigade-Major in the London Scottish, and you can't imagine what he said."

I could!

I'd been expecting that for some time, and after her indifference to my book, I really didn't care what he said.

Of course the only person really interested in the publication of a book is the author. This, I told myself, had got to be a best-seller, and it should be if whole-hearted push could help it. My world concentrated on it.

"Get some good photographs of yourself taken," said the publisher.

So off I went and had some good photographs taken, and I was in such a seventh heaven of delight that any photograph would have been a wild success. I implored the photographer to make me look 'really old', which I believed would help the book a lot—little knowing! For the average authoress looks an authoress, and I don't mean this unkindly, for usually it means that she has got the devil of a lot to live down.

I was introduced to the firm's publicity man, who said they intended having some postcards printed to

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advertise the book, and as I undoubtedly had friends to send them to, how many could I dispose of? Arithmetic never being one of my stronger points, I said that I could do with a couple of thousand, which seemed to surprise the publicity man a good deal. "You've got a hell of a lot of friends!" said he.

He was co-operative and charming. We used to go out for coffee into St. Paul's Churchyard, and he realized how much this all meant to me in getting the book under way, and he did his very best to help. And so did Gwen Gilligan.

The first things to deal with were the proofs.

CHAPTER FIVE

A novel is a lovesome thing,
God wot!
Or not!

THE publicity man little knew the difficulties that those proofs provided for me. Two sets of galley proofs arrived at my house, and a copy of my own rather battered manuscript. All of them were marked *urgent* in large letters, and looked important, the accompanying note begging me not to delay their return.

One of the sets was inscribed "Marked Proof", the other was apparently the unmarked proof, though it did not say so, and what I did with them I had no idea at all. Much less what to do with the battered manuscript.

So up I trotted to Wyatt Tilby to ask what to do. He was always my refuge in time of trouble. He said that I corrected the marked proof, kept the unmarked proof for myself, and made rude suggestions as to what to do with the manuscript. Then he warned me that the publishing firm allowed six pounds only to cover their mistakes, and any more private alterations that I made off my own bat would be debited to me. I should have to pay any difference there was myself, and if I went wholeheartedly at it, I might find it to be considerable. This was horrifying. Supposing that I spent the whole of my twenty-five pounds advance (on account of royalties to come) in corrections, whatever should I do? The obvious answer was to take no risks and not do too much. After all, I argued, for a book to be accepted at all showed that it needed very few corrections.

How I flattered myself!

I thought that the proofs looked quite marvellous (most authors delude themselves this way), I really wouldn't have believed that my book could look so good, I told myself, and undoubtedly all my friends would be enormously impressed. They'd got a surprise coming to them! So had I, though I didn't know it then!

Laboriously I dealt with the first page of the marked proof, one long interminable page, to find no mistakes that I recognized at all, and then wondered what the next move was. I looked dubiously at the second page, but by this time I was tired of the work. Correction was never my strong line, and I couldn't be bothered. It seemed logical to gather that the publisher's proof corrector himself knew more about it than I did, and it seemed only polite to let him have it his own way. In fact I argued that it would be quite impertinent for me to interfere.

Glancing hastily at the rest of the proofs (and thinking that the chapter headed "Anemesis" looked particularly sophisticated!), I let it pass, doing it up and dispatching it well within time to the firm.

That's one milestone passed, said I.

The trouble being that of course it wasn't passed. It was very much to come. I had made a hopeless mess of the thing, but didn't know it—then.

I now had a little trouble with a most bewildering thing called a "blurb". The publisher's note asking if I would let them "have the blurb," sent me dithering. I was apprehensive that here was another of those snags that seemed to be eternally cropping up in the life of a first novel. I went off to the Tilbys again, but this time they must have seen me coming, because they had gone to Harrogate for a month and had left no address.

I asked my friend, old Bill, who had no idea what it

could be, but thought it sounded like a new word, and that the publisher was trying to be rude. I thought it was a bit vulgar myself. I went up to London and mercifully met Gwen Gilligan to whom I was selling a series on *Cold Wives*, revelations by one of them! We went out to have coffee at a little café called "Mrs. Jones", an underground place where you got delicious coffee and bought marvellous lingerie at absurd prices at the same time. Undoubtedly they were stolen goods. Gwen said that a "blurb" was the synopsis, the little advertising bit that tempts readers to buy, and is put on the jacket.

"Jacket?" said I.

"Yes, of course."

I felt a pretty good fool as I asked what the jacket might be. Apparently it was what I had always called the "paper wrapper". "But," said I, remembering the eulogistic phrases that I had read on these wrappers, "surely they cannot expect an author to write that sort of stuff about herself?"

"Oh, but they usually do," said Gwen.

This was an eye-opener. I began to think considerably less of the writing friends who had written their own blurbs, which did not raise them in my personal estimation. Still, it was expected of me. I must say that writing the blurb was far more difficult than writing the whole book, and I had to get help with it. I had been filled with the insane longing to end it "Hoping-this finds-you-as-it-leaves-me", but refrained. The publishing world is not renowned for its sense of humour, and with my first novel coming out, it was no time for me to start trying to be funny.

When I finished it, the blurb had to be entirely re-hashed by the firm; I rather hedged the "brilliant young writer" business, and "a first book of great promise", etc.

I had been a desperate failure at boosting myself on

the blurb, but the Lord knows I did my best in other directions! I was fully determined that the book should not sink through any slackness on my part, all I had got should be put into it, and all I'd got did go into it, and it was good measure.

When two thousand postcards arrived I nearly swooned. They looked enormous. Recovering from the first shock, I started my campaign. Whenever I went to London I took my postcards with me. I never sat down in 'bus or Tube without having adroitly popped a postcard under me, to be used as a cushion. This had to be done with skill, because the right side up showed a startling photograph of myself with a new perm, draped in the shawl from the piano and looking rather musical comedy, but (I flattered myself) rather good. The postcard had to be slipped under, address side up, because of this, so that the revealing picture was concealed. Occasionally unkind people called after me with "I say, you've left this!" and handed me the card with my photograph uppermost, which was shattering.

I put my postcards into any old letter box that offered itself; into waiting taxicabs, and once inadvertently into a Rolls outside the offices of the firm, never realizing that this belonged to the great Panjandrum himself!

I circularized the births column of the *Times*, and I still had postcards galore left. I seemed sunk under them, I just couldn't get rid of them. I pushed them into people's doors, and since then I have often wondered what on earth they thought of them. I got a Crockford and did a lot of remote clergy, who I prayed might have a library subscription.

I then had a brighter idea, and did the mayoresses of England. The mayoress was easy meat because no address was required, it was just sent to the Mayoress of so-and-so. Mayors get superfluous correspondence

and might have pushed my valuable postcards aside, but I realized that the mayoress, not being so big a bug, might be a bookworm.

Everybody I had ever known, and a great many I did not know (and pray God shall never know), got my postcards. The postage entailed by this terrific effort would have completely collapsed any gun money funds, but I was earning on journalism and believed in truth that this was one of those cases when one simply mustn't spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar!

I went all out for it.

Eventually, one day in May, my book was published. I saw it advertised the night before in the evening papers, with the photograph of my new perm and piano shawl, and felt that already I was something big. Six copies were dispatched to me from the firm.

I must say they were awfully nice to me, for Gwen Gilligan and Rex Flatau took me out to Ciro's to celebrate it. I know I wore one of those frightful matron's hats that I insisted on wearing, to give them the idea that I was a woman of the world, and from under this hat must have looked very dewy-eyed and foolish.

On the train back to Frinton nobody seemed to know that my book had been published. Really, I thought, how unobservant the world in general is!

The first review was, I considered, unkind, little realizing how far too kind it really was. Other reviewers said that I had talent, but why in Heaven's name had not somebody gone through the proofs? Ask me another! The answer was, of course, that the only person who had gone through the proofs was one entirely unqualified to do so.

I had got to admit that although I had thought that the bound book looked marvellous, the critics opened my eyes pretty wide to a lot of things to which I had

unfortunately been as blind as a kitten. Maybe that was as well.

I still carried on with my postcard campaign. I still went to coffee with the publicity man in St. Paul's Churchyard, and I must say that he did put a punch behind that book for me. It sold quite well. Whether it was the births column, or the mayoresses, or putting postcards in 'buses, or coffee with the publicity man (which I should now think it was far more likely to have been), I don't know. But the thing sold!

I invested some money in a subscription to a press-cuttings agency, as advised by Leonard Crocombe. Three applied to me, enclosing the most generous reviews and omitting the one that had drawn attention to the frightful errors in script, and asking for my illustrious patronage. I bought a press-cuttings book, and started it with one of the famous postcards, right side up with self and perm. on the top of the page; other side up with space for address, and the bit that I had found so difficult to write about my "gifted pen" and "insight into human nature" and all that sort of thing, at the bottom of the page.

Well, the book was out! After about a month it disappeared from the advertisements, and only very occasional reviews from provincial papers came along.

But the postcards went on. There was still an enormous pile of them, and I was still sending them out with all the zest I'd got in me. And when God made me, where He couldn't put brains, He popped in zest!

The next agony was as to what I did about the second book. I dreaded the upheaval of writing yet another, and now when I came to think about it, I wasn't at all sure that it would be accepted.

Having told everyone in my first delirium of excitement that the contract was for three more (which I had thought it was), I could not very well ask for guidance

and direction as to whether it meant that the firm had *got* to buy my next book, or whether it was only that it had to be offered to them as the first one had been, on the good old system of hit or miss.

I eventually distributed a few discreet enquiries as to what the contract actually *did* mean, and it turned out to be that I was obliged to offer the next book, but that the firm was not obliged to accept it, which I thought a most unsatisfactory state of things.

I launched myself out into my second book in one white-hot whirl of enthusiasm. I called it *These Twain*, only to find that the title had already been used by Arnold Bennett. I wrote the complete book in under a month and it certainly was a good deal better than the first one, though very far from perfect.

Now I was introduced to someone who really was able to help me. So far Frank Lamburn and Leonard Crocombe had been my guiding stars, and these two men had steered me through the most difficult beginning of my career. I owe them both a debt of the deepest gratitude.

I met Michael Joseph.

At that time Michael was the manager of Curtis Brown Ltd., the agents, in Henrietta Street. I went there originally to see Nancy Pearn about short stories, and she told me that Michael wanted to meet me and sent me down to the first floor to see him. When I saw him I found his face familiar, and discovered that he had worked for a time for my publisher and had lent his face on one awful occasion for the real photographs that illustrated *True Story*. It had been for one of my worst efforts! He was the seducing owner of the big store, who, interviewing the poor little girl who had stolen a silver bag to buy food for a sick mother, said he would not prosecute if she, etc., etc. The etc., etc., part was illustrated with a photograph of Michael sitting in a revoltingly ordinary bedroom, wearing a

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top hat! I cannot think why he wore this, but there he was with walking stick and smart suit (a real old "naughty ninety" seducer, this!) whilst the girl was standing crying, and wearing a very airy-fairy princess petticoat.

Michael had not wanted to be photographed, but had been lured into it, and finally I don't think had had much chance. His face in the picture had looked exactly what he was thinking about the whole thing. I had said at the time that I thought the man might have appeared to be a bit more intrigued, and the moment that we met, I reminded him of this.

Michael glossed over my first publication, which, like myself, he thought little of. He said that we must get a good title for the next book, and as it had gipsies in it, it ought to be something about vagabonds. Vagabonds read well. He went through words that would 'go' with it.

"Ah," said he at last, "*Vagabond Harvest.*"

"But what does it mean?" I asked.

"Not a thing," said he, "but that doesn't matter."

He was quite right. Michael had a positive genius for choosing titles, and for guiding foolish young writers in the paths they should take. Thank God that I met him.

I typed out *Vagabond Harvest*, and sent it along to the publishers. Silence. I called, apparently on other matters, but with hope lurking in the old bos., and as nothing happened became extremely frightened. To have to admit a complete flop to the world in general would be horrifying now.

I made several moves, all futile, and the publicity man on whom I had pinned my faith suddenly removed himself to edit a musical paper somewhere or other in the country, which was a very bad loss to me.

I became extremely worried.

One week-end I found one of the leading lights of the

firm walking down Pole Barn Lane at Frinton, where I now lived, and trying to find my bungalow. The bungalow was called "Storyette", being built entirely out of the money made by stories, and I had spurned the suggestion of old Bill, who on the publication of *The Great Beginning* had put forward the idea that I should change the name to "The Novelty!"

The leading light, seeing me, said "Oh, I happened to be staying the week-end here with your publisher, and wondered if you'd care to dine with me?"

It looked like hope. I asked him to tea, acutely conscious of the fact that it was one of those days when the cake had run out. Could a woman have worse luck, with the publisher she was trying to propitiate? In those days I was not so willing for people to take me as they found me. I wanted to be grand; I believed in the good impression, little realizing that this is not Fleet Street. My Victorian-Edwardian upbringing at the Rectory had always played a gallant game of let's-pretend with life! My own difficult girlhood and still more difficult marriage had played the same game, and even then I did not appreciate that now I was amongst real people who needed no pretence.

I went out to dine at the Grand. Now, thought I, he'll be sure to mention the book. He did. It was after dinner, over the coffee, and there was the manuscript suddenly produced and lying on the table.

"Now what about this?" said he. Agony came over me. Oh horror, he was going to say that it was awful! "What do you think of it yourself?" he asked.

"I think that it's much better than *The Great Beginning*. Truly I do. I believe that people like reading about gipsies."

"Yes, that may be true. What were your sales?"

I didn't know. I never have known. Ask me the sales of my last book today, and I just haven't the faintest idea. I said that I didn't know.

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He said, "We're strongly tempted to take it. We think you are worth keeping."

I wasn't quite sure what he meant by that unfortunate remark, but glossed it over, and murmured something about the enormity of my gratitude.

"Lunch with me at the Ritz on Wednesday?" he said. "I'll have a word with the head of the firm by then, and will let you know the result."

The Ritz! Naturally I had never been inside it, but all my life had spoken of it with bated breath. My heroines had waltzed in and out, particularly that awful girl Ruth, who had all sorts of peculiar things happen to her on the mat there, but I had only looked and longed.

"The grillroom entrance," said he, "you know where I mean?"

"Yes, yes, oh, of *course*," I lied.

It would never do to confess what a wretched little country cousin I was. And then what happened? Just as I was all keyed up for the stately approach to the Ritz hotel, in a new hat, and with visions of all sorts of adaptions to my various journalistic activities of copy from this great and magnificent place, he telephoned that he was called out of London, and postponed the meeting.

"Sorry I'm delayed. Can't work it. Anyway, we're keeping the book."

CHAPTER SIX

No Lady in a fix
Looks at the flicks!

THE novels were on their feet. The third one, *The Driving of Destiny*, ran into a couple of editions, and when I saw this advertised—it was at Charing Cross station—I fainted with excitement.

Oh, I was taking my profession very seriously indeed!

A film firm had become interested in *The Great Beginning*, and wrote to me about it on rather showy, ostentatious paper.

I had got my foot into the back door of Wardour Street and the film world, because when my job of six fruity questions and replies a week went bad on me, it had been replaced by a film one. I had to see a weekly film, in one of the little private studios, and make a synopsis of it so that it made a more or less abbreviated short story, with a postscript acknowledgement to the firm. It was quite interesting, though sometimes I had to see two or three films before I could get the right ones. But it meant that I knew several of the people in the film world, and, as usual, my chief topic of conversation was my infernal book. Finally I managed to get a copy wafted on to the desk of a Big Noise.

This was strategy, it took me months to achieve it, but it was achieved, and the next thing that happened was that I had to interview the Big Noise, whom I found to be the most objectionable man. He interviewed me in his shirt sleeves, wearing the most drab braces I have ever seen; he was brusquely rude, and I am sure disliked me quite as much as I disliked him. But he said that he would buy the film rights, would have a

contract drawn up, and would I come in on Tuesday next to sign.

I was such a silly little duffer that I did not realize the folly of signing any old contract any old way; I just blessed the goodness and the grace that on my birth had smiled, for sending me a contract at all, and would have signed my own death warrant with the greatest alacrity.

"You take care to read it first," Wyatt Tilby warned me in the train.

"Well, of course," said I in an outraged tone. It would never do to let him know that I didn't intend reading it, seeing that as I shouldn't understand a word of what it was about, it couldn't make a ha'porth of difference to me. I think he was suspicious, because he kept harping on it, in a nauseating manner. He told me years later that it really did worry him, because he knew perfectly well that a lamb was about to be thrown to the lions!

However the Goodness and the Grace protect some lambs. They don't deserve it, but they get protected all the same.

On the Tuesday I arrived in London deliriously tight on air once more, and believing that again I was walking into Heaven, this time Wardour Street with the good old Soho smell. The firm had offered me three hundred pounds. Riches beyond belief, thought I. Three hundred, why it's a fortune! When they offered it they could have had little idea that I would have given them any right they wanted for a paltry tenner, and have been equally delighted.

A friend suggested that we should celebrate this great occasion with a "bit of a do" before I signed. But I was afraid of being late. I had never been late yet, and I wasn't going to start it now. My blotless copybook hurried me through a fourpenny coffee of celebration, and then I beat it for Wardour Street.

Naturally it had never looked lovelier! How could people talk of Princes Street, Edinburgh, as being beautiful when so exquisite Wardour Street had more allure? How bright was the glistening spaghetti in the Italian shops, how aromatic the smell of *merluzzo* and chianti. What fun to be a writer!

In the waiting-room there was obviously a hitch! Presently a rather glamorous secretary appeared, and asked if I had got an appointment? Yes, of course, said I, clinging to the kitchen chair, and trying not to look over-anxious, because I had rumbled that something had gone wrong.

"Oh," said she, and disappeared on very high heels. Presently back she came again to say that the Big Noise was busy. I suggested that if he handed me the contract I'd sign it here and now on the aspidistra if they wished. She said that they were writing to me about it.

I could do nothing but bid her goodbye, and walk out into lovely little Wardour Street, which now looked to be just plain sordid. Give me Princes Street, Edinburgh, every time. How filthy looked the spaghetti, how repellent the *merluzzo* smelt, how vile the cheap chianti!

They wrote to me a few days later saying that they had decided not to buy the film rights of *The Great Beginning*, after all. Yours faithfully, etc.

It was a very good thing that I had not celebrated and had only mentioned it to one or two good friends (naturally they said "How you exaggerate! I don't believe they ever meant to buy it at all!"). That extremely bitter pill had to be swallowed.

With films I have been the most devastating failure. Years later, I had a radio play broadcast one night, and actually within a few seconds of it finishing, a famous film firm rang me up and asked me to go to see them.

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Again I went off on air.

Another Big Noise saw me, and was so charming. He was very anxious for my work to succeed, thought I had a big untapped field here, and was helpful. I felt that under his wing, and being so ably shepherded, I might launch out into that great film world which had always remained an unexplored desert for me. We parted happily, he was so pleasant. To my horror I found in the *Times* a few hours later that he had died in his sleep.

There is also the difficulty with film companies to prevent them from buying the rights of a book with only the perverse idea of stopping any other firm from doing it, and not with the noble intention of shooting. There are wheels within wheels in this film world, as I discovered on my repeated visits to Denham to see a friend of my husband's who was on the staff there.

I always had great hopes that this friend would be able to do something to get me sold, but he could do nothing. He was on the supply side. Once, looking over his shoulder, I saw some most curious notes:

Three Igloos,
Four camels,
Arrangements for rain.

which I thought remarkable.

"What is all that?" I asked.

"Oh, that's only what I've got to get for tomorrow's shooting," said he lightly.

Then of course there was my one wild effort, brought upon me through no wish of my own, when I took part in a film. I didn't want to do this. I am no actress. It was an advertising stunt, not for myself, God forbid! It was certainly no advertisement for myself, it was for a brand of car, and before I knew where I was the thing was wished upon me!

I was staying in a country hotel and I was taken at dawn to the studios. Real dawn, I mean! When I got there I was made up in a caravan. This took an hour. It is really very finicky work, but interesting. I hardly knew the face that looked out of the glass at me. Then I went on to the set.

The set was a cottage scene, the sort of enormous mansion that film companies call cottages. It had gables and turrets and thatch, and a lot of geraniums in the front drive, which seemed to be miles long. There was the car drawn up in state and it was the sort of car that I shall never possess. I had spent the last forty-eight hours learning two pages of self-written script by heart. With every line I learnt, my heart sank more. It was vile! Robbie, my husband, and I played croquet all one afternoon, with me saying "my piece" to him. I thought the "piece" grew worse with every hoop.

He thought so, too.

I was still "saying my piece" when I got on to the set. Huge lights, great heat, everybody galvanized, and just hours of sitting whilst cameramen did this and that and the other, and lighting-effects men blew one another sky-high. Then the sound track got stuck. After a bit it was unstuck. Then it got stuck again, and finally we got to the kick-off. Self stepping into the car.

There was a dreadful rehearsal; never have I felt more self-conscious. Then there was saying my piece in the car, trying to look as if I was used to driving a car (which I am *not*), and trying to be myself, a most elusive person who simply dribbled away from me.

The finale was the worst bit. I refused to drive this high-powered car, of which I was terrified, so a man was smuggled on all-fours on the floor to work the pedals with his hands. I ended up with saying, "And so good-bye," putting gears in and going crashing off down my marvellous drive with the geraniums, etc.

This should have been fine of course, save that the

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man could not see what he was doing on the floor, and I couldn't tell him because of the sound track which picked up just everything it wasn't supposed to pick up, and off we went wallop into a lighting-effects stanchion with a man on it, who said the most frightful things very loudly!

That had to be abandoned.

When I went home that night I thanked God that it was finished. I might have saved myself the trouble, because it wasn't finished. The whole thing was a failure, and now they wanted to come down to the country hotel where I was staying and do it all over again outside the front door.

Oh, something or other! said I.

I am a modest woman. Fame is not my second name. I run from fans and wilt with an audience. I did not want everybody going pop-eyed in the hotel for this. The firm promised that they would arrive after the business train had left for the day, having got rid of the male workers of the place; the women had breakfast in bed, and could be relied upon to be down for the count till eleven.

Right, I agreed.

What happened?

You can bet I'd put my money on a loser. Early breakfast was in progress, I eating mine with all the men (I get to work early), when booming up the drive comes one long chain of covered lorries, marked in three-foot letters "Somebody or other's Moving Pictures". Another marked "Lighting Effects", the make-up van, the Sound Track, everything complete, all to anchor conspicuously outside the front door and set the entire hotel agog.

Naturally the gents who could, decided to telephone the office to say they would be along later in the morning. This was too good to miss!

I was made up bright yellow in my bedroom, and

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then had to walk out of the hotel in front of the camera. The sun refused to shine. The moment the vans arrived in it went, and that was that! Out came the lighting effects, the sound track trailed across the croquet lawn, and the miserable heroine of all this was myself, simply jittery with rage and nerves, and longing to scream.

The first lot was ruined by a deaf and dumb chamber-maid who, not knowing what was afoot, started to clean the windows diligently and noisily. The next lot was ruined by the children coming out of school. All day long I did the wretched thing whilst the guests gaped and I could have died of shame.

I looked too awful, but I felt a good deal more awful! Fifty pounds a day was sweated labour for this!

Then there was the dreadful finale when I waved my hand to the crowd, said goodbye, and drove off with the man crouched in the car. This time we shot off up the drive like hell itself. I had to steer it and nearly died of sheer agony as we went, missing the tennis pavilion only by a couple of feet.

Never again!

I wanted to get a pre-view but couldn't, and suddenly found that when the motor show was on at the Albert Hall they were showing the film. I snooped off to it, and couldn't get in. I had to queue, and the house was full just as it came to the man in front of me! I had a grouse about this and was finally put in a back seat with Robbie, where I sat in agony, sweating blood.

Presently it came to me. I look strangely unlike myself on the screen, or at least unlike what *I think* I'm like. I'm probably wrong.

I thought I looked conceited, rather silly, and oh the ridiculous things I had to say! But seeing the film, one forgot the awful background it had had. The house looked nice, I appeared to be leisurely and undisturbed, you would never have known when I went off down the drive that I hadn't driven a car all my life, and that

particular car, too! The mere thought of a man on the floor was just too idiotic.

All the same, I hoped nobody else would see it. Of course they did. Everybody I wanted not to see it managed to get a peep at it. I kept very quiet about it.

It was rather like the time when in Seaview Michael Joseph took a ciné film of Robbie and me and the children, his and mine. We went to dinner with Michael and his wife to see it in London, and I thought that it was a grand film, but Robbie couldn't get over his nose. He had never thought he had a nose like that.

"God, it's an elephant's trunk!" said Robbie when he first saw it.

All the way home he kept on telling me how frightful he thought his nose was, what a bitter disillusionment that film had been to him, and how mean he thought Michael had been to do it!

The film job in Wardour Street died on me at the end of a couple of years. It had been a solid income whilst it lasted. The thing in journalism is to keep by you one job which is on a regular income and stick to it.

On the whole, literary work is so fly-by-night. I had found that a good trick was to find out what an editor's pet hobby was, and then write along those lines. Articles are often sold like this. One man who bought a lot of mine was keen on cremation; he'd buy anything about cremation. I used to think out a new twist on it (not so easy as it sounds) and trot it off to him.

One day, just as I came out of the editorial office, the young sub bobbed out at me.

"Look here," said he, "what the hell do you mean by selling all those articles on cremation to the old man? How do you suppose we are going to get them illustrated?"

I hadn't thought of that!

At the end of three or four years I knew nearly all the

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editors. I have only met one whom I disliked, and I should think that is a record. But then I liked the *cameraderie* of Fleet Street, which, once you have got through the initial front-door barrier, will do anything to help. I have only met kindness in the street of adventure. And, pray Heaven, I give kindness back. I hope so.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Oh, what a woman was Winifred!
Oh, what a girl was she!

YEARS ago, when I was very young indeed, I used to read and re-read the letter page of a certain very well-known twopenny magazine for women.

I had become then a devoted admirer of the lady who, under the name of Winifred, wrote such inspired replies on vital matters of the heart. Once I had even written to her myself, under the emotional pseudonym of "Broken-Hearted Butterfly", a pleasing touch, so I thought. It was the time when I wanted to marry a young gentleman, considered by my family to be considerably beneath me in position, and I wanted to know whether to be led by Mother, or by my heart.

Winifred got out of it with a glorious performance of dexterity; she said that I must allow my own heart to choose, but must do nothing to make my poor mother anxious, which left me exactly nowhere. I didn't worry her again, because I found her advice difficult to carry out. Naturally if I did follow my heart's dictates, my poor mother would have been most considerably worried. Anyway, in the end, the young man in question went off with somebody else, which simplified proceedings.

One day the editor of this paper sent for me.

"Would you care to be Winifred?" she asked. I simply could not believe it.

"I'd never be able to write a reply. Why, the first enquiry would bowl me out," I said.

"I've always thought you very well suited to the job. You're very sympathetic and understanding, you try it for a month."

I tried it for six years!

Now in this job I believe that I was in my niche. My first husband had studied for the Bar, and being unable to memorise anything he read, I had been obliged to read out loud to him; from this I got quite a good smattering of law. My district visiting in my youth had taught me the human touch. I have great sympathy with pain and mental anguish, and although I pray not a "buttinski", I *do* want to help suffering humanity.

Every Saturday Winifred's weekly mail bag would arrive, and bit by bit I built it up until it became very large. My friends said "Don't you laugh?" but Winifred wasn't there to laugh, and after all, there is nothing so excruciatingly funny in the tragedies of womankind.

The little girl who has quarrelled with her boy friend believes that she cannot bear the burden or raise her head again; the unmarried mother is nearly demented; the woman in love with the married man has no idea where to turn next; there is the mother who has lost her son, or who has suddenly learnt of an incurable disease; all these came to Winifred, and I do believe they found her understanding.

But I had my bad moments, and people did play tricks.

There was one beastly girl, a Miss Blossom, giving a Portsmouth address, who wrote to me (on a typewriter) for full details (plainly put, please) of the facts of life. My husband was in the room when this arrived, it was a first of April, which like a fool I'd forgotten, and looking in my drawer for some of the rather vague little books I used to distribute in such cases, I said, "Oh Lord, I've run out of books! Now what on earth shall I do about the Blossom girl?"

He burst out laughing.

He had been Miss Blossom, never thinking that I would swallow it. Naturally this opened my eyes to the depths of depravity to which one's own family will

stoop, and after this I was always on the look-out for leg-pulls, and got them of course. But the curious point is that when you have done this job for a time you become hyper-sensitive to letters, and by merely opening one and beginning to read it, you know instinctively if there is any funny business afoot.

At times this was quite a pathetic pursuit. Tragedy is for ever looking up at you with a postage stamp on it, and you never know what ultimately happens. I have written long letters back, and have prayed that a suicide has been averted, or an unmarried mother has realized that time will make the mistake easier, and that her greatest friend will be the child she now longs only to destroy. And I have never known.

I took my unmarried mothers very seriously indeed, sending many to the Mission of Hope at South Croydon (a most commendable Home), and going there to visit them if they were lonely and wanted to see me.

The feeling that, at this particular moment in their lives, they have a hand extended to them by a stranger *does* make a big difference, and they needed someone like Winifred to go along and see them.

But alas, lots of people look upon a letter-bag as being a glorious chance to get to know you personally. They offer you manuscripts. They never realize the length of time bought up in reading a manuscript, more particularly if it is written by hand, and before very long I had to make it a rule to say no thank you to this. Only the poems were read, and oh, how often I wished that I had banned them too!

I myself started with verses, and probably ought to have been shot for it, but certainly I did no worse than some of my readers. Half the poetry might have been intended for a joke page, the other half as Heaven knows what. Only once did I get a reader who could write really excellent verse, and today she beats me at my own game!

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But that is good. It is as it should be!

When very young, I wrote a touching poem, unfortunately published with my own spelling:

God sent a little bark
On a river wide,
Out with the evening star,
And the ebbing tide;
With the breath of morning,
When that pale star did wane,
Baby didn't like the world
And so went back again!

Oh dear!

One of my boyish admirers fell completely from grace when this was published, for he said "It sounds as if God kept bow-wows!"

This unfortunate attempt of my own was all on a par with many of my readers' efforts, but I felt that I had had so much to discourage me in my own career, that I was sadly loth to discourage anybody else.

Before very long I discovered that readers were unlikely to catch me out, as the editor in her greater experience had assured me. The one difficulty was the slightly eccentric person who simply *must* write a letter to somebody. I got old regulars of the letter-bag, and I had difficulties with them!

There was a woman once from the back of the beyond, and she wrote to me every week. She dished up all kinds of enquiries when she had exhausted the more usual ones, and although I grew terser and terser, and colder and colder, nothing would stop her. Drawing on her pretty vivid imagination, she peppered me good and hard. Would I write her a pleasant letter to send to her grandmother? How did one get rid of nits in the hair? (This is for our beauty editor, said I with firmness). She was going to a fancy-dress dance, what could she go as, 40-inch hips and five foot three, but nice eyes.

On and on this went, and was completely devastating. One does not mind if one is being helpful, but when one is merely filling a lonely streak, and already has a heavy letter-bag, it is difficult.

Suddenly she moved her scene of action, and to my horror I found her well within distance of the country hotel where I happened to be living, though she naturally did not know this. The move gave her all sorts of excuses to inundate me with letters. Which train should she catch? What would she do with her luggage? And, eventually, how lonely she was in the new village and how in the world could she make fresh friends?

By this time I had been having a couple of letters a week from her for over a year, and she was one of my most difficult "heavy-steadies". I gathered that she was a trifle odd and something had got to be done to stop her. So I told her to get in touch with the Rector of the parish, confide her loneliness in him, and ask if he hadn't some nice club that she could join.

After all, my father used to get this sort of case every day of the week, so why not the Rector of what-you-may-call-it? This was apparently a wild success, though I don't suppose the Rector thought too much of it! but anyhow I heard no more from my reader, who apparently *had* made some nice friends, and had tired of Winifred.

A week or so later the hotel had a tennis party, and I saw a young clerical gent disporting himself on the lawn, and asked who he was. "Oh," said my informant, "that's the Rector of what-you-may-call-it, and he knows you are here and says that he very much wants to have a word with you, because he believes you come from . . ." naming the publishing firm.

I went to London for the afternoon.

I knew why he wanted to see me, and thought that the wiser policy was to fly. Though I still think that it was very mean of him! I'd had her on my hands for over a year, and he'd only had her for a week or so.

It really *was* his turn.

There are lots of readers like this.

They float in in their dozens. There was one who wrote all about nothing for weeks on end, and when I told her that she really must have some definite question to ask me, or else not write, she took offence. She said that she intended waiting outside the offices of the firm and shooting me when I went there next day. She knew me by sight, she stated, as she had seen me going in and out every morning. I never went to the office more than once a week, but now seized the opportunity not to go near it for a month, and so give her the chance to shoot somebody else!

The Winifred job expanded. Apparently the firm found me very useful in this niche, and I loved the work.

Another editor sent for me, and gave me a page in another paper. I was asked to edit it and did so. It was called *Be My Friend*, because I maintain that half the world is very lonely, and wants a friend more than anything else.

I refused to do the routine thing of filling my first page with a lot of bogus letters, which everybody knows are bogus, but gave a full personal letter from myself, explaining what a completely ordinary woman I was, and illustrated with photos of myself doing humble jobs.

I am a most domesticated person, so I had a series of photos taken of myself cooking, scrubbing a floor, wielding a sewing machine, etc. A press photographer obliged, but a frightful mess was made of the cooking photo, because I tucked what I thought to be a tea-towel round me to do for the apron, and came out with the word "Lavatory" across my stomach! That had to be scrapped.

Be My Friend was a big success. I think everybody in this world wrote in. I started the letter-bag at about

two a week, opened up with my personal letter and photographs, and the first post brought in eighty-nine letters with a bang. Everybody wrote, I made some dear friends this way (I hope lifelong ones), but I worked very hard for it.

Once a month I would go and visit a really needy case. This got me into worse difficulties than I had bargained for. Once I went to see a girl who was desperately worried because she was going to have a baby. She was a maid in a flat, and she rang me up saying that her employers would be at church on the Sunday morning, which would be the best time for me to see her. Off I went. I wanted to talk to her in the kitchen, but she didn't like this idea at all and insisted on seeing me in the sitting-room. All the time I was horrified as to what would happen if the mistress of the house came over queer in church and returned unexpectedly. I could not possibly explain my mission without incriminating the poor girl (which I must never do) and could only suffer what might prove to be the most ignominious kick-out myself!

My husband, who was waiting for me outside, not understanding the old parson's daughter interest, thought that it would serve me right if I *was* kicked out. After all, he argued, what other editor of such a page would take the trouble to visit the needy?

All the same, I continued this habit, and got into some pretty hot spots on occasions, though I must say that I like it.

Of all the hot spots that I have ever got into, the worst I ever had was interviewing the wife of a murderer, which was nothing to do with being anybody's friend. This was years before I got that far; I had gone into an office with my tongue hanging out for a job, and the editor had said "Then take that one!" I think with the intention of putting me off for ever with my very first interview.

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I took it. It was more than I had bargained for.

Her husband was to be hanged in the morning, and it had been a particularly nasty murder. She wasn't a very nice woman, making a good price for her interview first of all. I felt frightful about butting in on such a moment. I needn't have done. We became buddies in a big way. In the end we had a really matey discussion as to the etiquette of attending the hanging outside the prison. I begged her not to go, but of course she would, but wanted to know if one went in black when not a widow on arriving, though definitely one when driving away.

I couldn't work it out for her, though I tried hard enough.

Reporting and running a letter-bag each offer its own quiet fun, I suppose, if fun you can call it, because much of it is tragic. I loved the people who wrote to me. Some of them were sweetness itself, you would not have believed how kind and how good to me they were.

They would begin their letters "Dear Ursula" and sign them "Yours ever, Miss Smith". Some of them I met, and liked. There were very few whom I met and didn't like.

There was the charming man who wrote from America asking me if he might call his little girl after me. I wrote and asked for a photo of her, giving them my blessing, and my name. When the photograph came, months later, the child was a black one!

CHAPTER EIGHT

No Lady, last of the Bloom scions,
A simple mouse, midst literary lions!

THE first book that ever did anything for me was *Candleshades*. It was a bad book but had an idea behind it, and was about more real people. It ought to have been my first book really, but I had made the horrible mistake of "learning in print." It will take me a lifetime now to convince reviewers that cheap romance is not my line, and that truly I don't like it.

I plunged wildly into cheap romance because I thought it was the easiest way in. I thought that if I slipped into Fleet Street by the back door, in time I'd work up to the front door. But it's hard going!

To this day half the world judges me by my first seven, and most unfortunate, books.

When *Candleshades* came out, I invested a little in a publicity agent of my own. This was Basil Tozer. Basil was a charming man, which is more than you can say for publicity agents as a whole, he also had the additional merit of being a journalist himself. He went to a great deal of trouble on behalf of his clients, nothing was really too much bother for him, and before I knew where I was, every paper in the world seemed to be producing little paragraphs about me, and most of them were news to me!

I seemed to have got married a great many years before I really had done, when a blushing seventeen, which was not true. At seventeen I was busily getting myself engaged and disengaged to quite another man, but that is another story. My new second husband had all sorts of romances twirled about him. My childish

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efforts (chiefly written by ambitious parents), *Tiger*, *Girlie* and *Winifred*, were flashed into the limelight.

I also seemed to have modelled for photographers, I gathered without too much on, which was also not true. I did do odd modelling, but it was my butter-won't-melt-in-my-mouth face that the photographers went for. My girlish efforts of playing the piano at the cinema to earn the family bread and butter were flaunted. Talk about raking up a story! Nothing seemed to escape him.

"And," said Basil, "you've got to come out of your shell and meet some of your contemporaries. It won't do to be hanging back all the time, you know."

All this while, I had hardly met any of my own ilk; I'd been so busy hanging on to Fleet Street tooth and nail, that I somehow had never been able to meet other people. I knew the editors, my agents, and the publishers. Michael had once introduced me to an American publisher who, he said, he thought would do for me nicely. I have never been quite sure whether that was quite what Michael meant! The old man was of the sugar-daddy type, and he walked me out of C.B.'s office into the Strand for tea at his hotel.

"I'm at the Victoria Hotel," said he, "we'll take a taxi."

"But that's only just round the corner?" I protested, thinking that the poor old man didn't know his bearings.

The trouble was that he did know his bearings, and wanted to know more of mine. I was horrified to find what kind of a taxi ride it was to be, and on the steps of the Victoria Hotel I told him that he could go somewhere else before he published for me in the U.S.A. Then I took the taxi back to C.B.'s to tell Michael what I thought of him.

I think the old man got his own back on me, because I had to pay all the fare of course, and when I got to C.B.'s Michael had nipped off to a tea dance!

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I did *not* publish in America; leastways not just then!

Basil said that the first thing to do was to dine at the P.E.N. club. This was a literary club with a monthly dinner, speeches, guests of honour, etc., and it had been founded by Mrs. Dawson-Scott. I was terrified.

The first time I ever went (afterwards I became a member), Rebecca West was in the chair, and a very charming chairwoman she was. Basil introduced me, and to my amazement she knew all about the publication date and name of my new book. I had thought I would be the merest mouse amongst the literary lions, and was bewilderingly shy, but instead the lions were kind.

I liked Mrs. Dawson-Scott enormously. She was a small woman with a very much alive personality; she took likes and dislikes and could be difficult, but I like women of spirit. Living in St. John's Wood, I believe she used to go out shopping with a kimono over her nightie, not giving a damn! But then she didn't give damns. She had had the inspiration for the P.E.N. Club when camping out in Cornwall. She used to camp out on a cliff there, and one night a lot of it fell down, and I believe her small camp bed was just jutting out of the bit that was left, with Mrs. Dawson-Scott still in it! It wouldn't have worried her a hoot, of course, because she wasn't easily worried.

When she thought of the P.E.N. Club she was so pleased with the idea that she caught the next train to London, and started it then and there.

Mrs. Dawson-Scott had two sons and a daughter; the youngest son sat beside me. His name card was marked "Walter Scott", and I was in such a dither that it might easily have been the ghost of Sir Walter.

But it wasn't the ghost of Sir Walter, it was young Toby, and if ever there was a gay young man, that young man was young Toby!

Once, a year or so later, at one of his mother's always

enjoyable parties he played the filthiest trick on my poor husband! Robbie has the strongest of strong heads, he never gets drunk.

"Now promise me you won't say anything," said young Toby, and I like an idiot promised, "but I'll make your Robbie tight."

"Nonsense!" said I brightly.

"Ha, ha," said young Toby. He calmly filled up Robbie's whisky with gin instead of water. Apparently like that you can't taste it. As I'd promised, and I am very particular about keeping my word, I couldn't actually *tell* Robbie, but I whispered to him "I-shouldn't-drink-that-if-I-were-you." Robbie is one of those stalwart boys of the Bulldog breed, to whom you cannot drop hints. I defy anyone to drop a gentle hint to Robbie! Either he doesn't hear it, or he booms out at you in a particularly clear voice that he has no idea what you are talking about, and whichever way he takes it, it is defeating.

"Rot!" said Robbie, and then to be aggravating, "I'll have another."

There was I hopping about on pins, whilst he had three! There's going to be trouble here, I thought, whilst young Toby cackled to himself, and there was nothing that I could possibly do to help.

Robbie felt grand until he got into the air, then he felt dreadful, and even worse when he got home and to bed, where he said that the wardrobe was waving at him. How I cursed that awful boy!

However, inadvertently I got my own back on him without meaning to. One Christmas I sent him a rather tiddly little packet of cigarettes that caught my fancy, marked *Happy Christmas from Ursula*, not knowing that his sister-in-law had the same name. I get so used to mine being a fairly uncommon name that such an idea never enters my head. This arriving on Christmas Eve, gave young Toby the horrors. Gasping 'Heavens, and

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I've got nothing for her. She's never done this before, how frightful!" he rushed off to Baker Street and, the only shop that he could find open being a chemist, he bought the most expensive bottle of bath salts (which he didn't want to buy at all, but which was all the chemist had left!).

Too late, he discovered that his Ursula had not even given him a thought, but was overcome by his unbounded generosity and now found herself in a bit of a spot through it. I wouldn't have believed that one small packet of cigarettes could have worked such havoc in the Dawson-Scott family.

The P.E.N. Club could be quite amusing, much depended on its guests, some of whom were delightful and made the wittiest speeches, but others were oh, so dull, and dull speakers never know when to stop.

Also its major difficulty began with its members, some of whom were deaf and aged, and who, when I became a little better known, pleaded for introductions to editors, which did make it very hard.

I'm not good at saying no. This accounts for the fact that I was engaged so many times before I ever married; even if I knew there was no hope for the man, I could never bring myself to say no to him. Some of these writers who sought help had published as far back as 1902, and knew absolutely nothing of modern requirements, but still hoped to continue their literary activities, believing that if once they could get the personal touch it would make all the difference in the world.

It was so awkward.

Just at first of course I was very far from prosperous, and could enjoy myself without any fear of interruptions of this kind. I just sat at humble tables and watched the great. I know that people say that literary lions are lofty, but I found them very charming indeed.

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There was that evening when I said to Hermon Ould, the secretary, "Put me by any old dud, I don't mind," just to show him what an obliging member I was. But Hermon got his own back! Looking at the name card by my side when I sat down, I saw on it the simple words:

H. G. WELLS.

Which reminds me that the last time I ever went to the P.E.N. was on H.G.'s seventieth birthday, when George Bernard Shaw was speaking, and he got up, shaking his head tragically, to start most mournfully with:

"Poor old Wells!"

There was that night when Rabindranath Tagore spoke for thirty minutes, never raising his eyes or his voice, so that no one could hear a word that he said, and to add to the horror, a man across the street started to practise the trombone, with an energy that his trombone instructor might have admired, but which was agony to all of us. It was all the more maddening to know that what Rabindranath Tagore was saying was exquisite, but not one of us could hear it.

John Galsworthy was the president when I first went there, quiet, dignified, with the kindest eyes in the world, and always a most interesting speaker.

I met Dennis Bradley there, then very interested in spiritualism, having only recently been converted, and he was absorbed in it. He almost persuaded me to attend a direct-voice sitting, and I would have gone had I not been too frightened. Henrietta Leslie, always the same, who lived in a lovely house in Glebe Place, where a real fig tree grew in her eighteenth-century drawing-room and scattered leaves rather mournfully on her guests. Ethel Mannin, who I thought was beautiful in a quiet way, but who could be forceful and had a mind of her own. She had just made

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a big hit with her books, and looked like coming right up to the top of the literary ladder. There was Doris Leslie, a dear, and the Kean Seymours, Beatrice with her leonine hair, and her keen interest in everything, and Billy who had just been down to Tring to Mr. Leif's to lose a couple of stone by sitting in a Sitz bath, or so he said.

Everybody went to the P.E.N. Club; you met them all there one after another, and great fun it was.

From the P.E.N. I joined the Thursday Club, under the influence of Nellie Tom-Gallon and Mrs. Rose Champion de Crespigny. The Thursday was a tea-bibbing club held first of all at Eustace Miles' restaurant in Chandos Street, and later on in the Foyle galleries in Manette Street. It had not so many lions as the P.E.N. of course, but it was amusing.

It was a four to six club, and G. B. Burgin used to arrive with the most enormous pears which he grew in his garden and would insist (very generously, but so awkwardly) on giving you a couple. This invariably meant that your husband's pockets came into action, the husband objecting very much, and the pears were always as hard as bullets and had to be put in the dark to ripen; usually you forgot all about them in the home until you started to wonder what the smell was!

Ralph Straus and Cecil Roberts were members, and there was a large collection of people like myself, who really had not done anything very much.

But Nellie Tom-Gallon wasn't satisfied with the Thursday Club. Tea was all very well, said she, but it never had attracted men yet, and the thing to do was to get something with a bit of a nip in it as a parting shot. Tea was too insipid, she thought, and bought some sherry!

She was completely horrified when she found that in dispensing sherry for a small fee, she was breaking the

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law, and would probably be had up in consequence. And she only discovered this when the sherry had gone round twice, and then some beast told her, and frightened her stiff.

Leonard Crocombe took me for the first time to the Foyle Luncheon, which was then fast becoming famous. Claude Luke was with us.

The Foyle Luncheon had been inaugurated by Christina Foyle, who was a most charming and ingenuous-looking little girl, with dark hair and eyes, and ideas. I don't know how she thought of it, but she did, and a wild success she made of it.

Nothing of the rather dowdy literary society here, because too many of them are a bit dusty, but the Foyle Luncheon was never dusty. It was smart, meticulous, and clever.

Christina always got hold of a good subject, a debatable subject, and she saw to it that at the lunch she got lions, the sort of lions that people want to meet. The Lion of Judah was one of her bigger catches! Nobody ever knew how she did it. Nothing was too big for Christina to tackle, yet meeting her you wouldn't have thought that she knew how to tackle anybody. She was persuasion personified.

Here's to the girl, who had a hunch
About the way to give a lunch!

People flocked to the Foyle Luncheons, held in Grosvenor House. The stars sat at the long top table (how I gaped at them with envy!), with all the other tables running down the room, so that everybody got a look in.

That first time I went it was a circus lunch with Bertram Mills as a guest; he spoke for ages and nothing in this world would make him leave off. The Toastmaster, a glorious creature in scarlet, looked at his watch, then consulted Mr. Foyle. Finally he tapped

Bertram Mills' shoulder. One felt that Bertram Mills was disappointed, he could have gone on for ever, and most interesting he was too, but there were other speakers to follow. When he did sit down the next speaker had to begin at the middle of his speech, and never wholly recovered from the shock.

Later on, when I had to speak myself, I learnt just how unnerving that can be, but of course at that time I thought it rather a joke, as one does when one is ignorant.

I think the best lunch the Foyles ever gave was the *In Town To-Night* one, which I personally enjoyed more than I can say, even though a tipster *did* borrow ten bob from me! They put all the cockneys at the top table, Ras Prince Monolulu with his gay feathers dripping into the soup, a couple of coster lads who picked up the chicken and ate it with their fingers, chi-iking the waiters at the same time, and a one-man band. There was also a man with a monkey which escaped, and it swarmed up and down the pillars and balconies of Grosvenor House, and did something frightful to a banner.

I am afraid I laughed so much at that lunch that I felt thoroughly ill afterwards, and my son, who was with me, *was* ill!

There was the spelling-bee lunch, to which I went to enjoy myself, but my enjoyment was cut short with a shattering jar! Ethel Mannin having defaulted, they wanted me as a substitute. By then I was a bit better known, of course.

I can't spell. I never have been able to, I never shall, and when Ethel Mannin ratted I think she was a judge. In vain did I protest behind the scenes that I'd be the veriest dud, they told me that there would be nothing difficult, and anyhow it was all amongst friends. Authors against publishers, and I'd be with Naomi Jacob, and Pam Frankau, and it would be quite all right.

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What words they were! Mickey Jacob was landed with "phthisis" to spell, and was frightfully pleased because, having had it, she made sure she could spell it. But she couldn't! I got "occiput", "viridescent", which S. P. B. Mais, the master of ceremonies, explained meant "going green". I don't care what it meant to him, it meant going down for me! "Heifer" which was the only one I did know, but in my excitement I got hiccups, and if there is something unfortunate to get in front of an audience of about a thousand, it's hiccups!

One of my last efforts at a Foyle lunch was when we had a ninepenny or shilling lunch, I forget which, on the God-bless-Lord-Woolton idea. Afterwards some of the chosen few were filmed eating their bob's worth. I was one of them and did my best to appear bright, and later in the week popped into the nearest cinema to see myself on the Pathé Gazette, only to find that I'd been the one they'd cut out! Such is fame!

CHAPTER NINE

No Lady gets some small renown
Because she comes to London town.

I TOOK a flat in London in 1928. I had been living near Epping, surely one of the coldest parts of the country, and the large old house in which I and my family dwelt, suddenly went bad on me. It was in Christmas week, and I came to look for a flat in London. My brother had now left me, my son was at a prep. school, and my husband was serving abroad. There seemed little point in living in a big old house, when a flat would be all that I needed.

I found what I wanted in Battersea, common, but with cheap rents, and surely the most attractive shopping in the world. I and my maid, Rose, who had been with me some time, took up our residence there, and this was where the career began in deadly earnest.

I had laid the foundation stones from afar. I had got past the awful epoch of plastering 'buses with my beastly postcards: I could sell to a few magazines without quite so many refusals; I had a contract for novels, and was improving.

Now for the big newspapers.

The *Daily Sketch* accepted small articles, but I was after bigger fry. Once I offered an article called *My Son's Wife* to the *Daily Mail*, more in fun than anything else, because I felt that the market was far too grand for me, but when I opened my copy twenty-four hours later, there it was in print! Fame, said I.

A letter from Campbell Dixon, then the literary editor, sent me scuttling off to Heaven, via Bouverie Street. This was my first admittance into one of the

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great newspaper offices; I'd tried, God knows, only to be hoofed out again, and with surprising promptness, but this time I got in. Mr. Glover, the enormous commissionaire of those days, received me and was very kind. He never forgot a face, just as I hope I never forgot to enquire after his sciatica.

Rumour had it that one day, when Lord Northcliffe was becoming very ill and giving strange orders, he had a row with his advertising editor, swore that Mr. Glover could do it a great deal better, sent for him and appointed him as advertising editor. Mr. Glover was horrified! He sat at a desk surrounded by innumerable telephones all going at once, and went nearly mad with bewilderment. He was truly thankful when somebody relieved him of his new job, and let him go back to the front door, which he thoroughly understood.

The *Daily Mail* offices are immaculate. I filled in my little form at the desk, read the last issue off the press, and then was wafted up to the Great Presence. Frightened? Very, but enormously exhilarated. I only wish that Lord Northcliffe could have known the kick I got through walking down the very corridor; through seeing the reporters at their desks in the central offices, through hearing the chatter of typewriters and the hum of distant presses. This was where I had always wanted to be, inside one of those steel and glass palaces of the great world of daily printing.

When the boy paused outside the door, my heart turned right over. A moment later I was inside. Campbell Dixon need not have terrified me, it was just I who had terrified myself. He was sitting at a desk with his back to the door, talking to a couple of men who apparently were not doing their stuff.

He said, "It's absolute nonsense to come in here and say that you can't get hold of Philip Gibbs. Of course you can get hold of him. It's your job to find out where he is and to contact him."

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I, standing on the threshold, thought so—that's-what-journalists-have-to-do! They've got to find people when wanted, and my brain going spinning on ahead thought, I-bet-I'd-find-him-given-a-chance. What-a-couple-of-boobs-they-must-be!

Campbell Dixon was charming, and later he introduced me to the fiction editor, Langley Edwards.

"You'd better try a short story on us," he said.

At this juncture the most I had ever earned in payment for a short story was eight guineas, which I thought to be sheer robbery on my part, because I did so love doing them that surely I ought to pay the magazine, not the magazine pay me. I went home and wrote a short story which failed, from sheer excitement, I suspect. A second shot succeeded and brought me in fifteen guineas, which looked bewildering.

I was so elated that I went home and wrote another. Now as I lived in Battersea, which was only approachable by 'bus, I used to pass Chelsea Infirmary. This had given me the sudden inspiration for one of those infrequent stories which are sure winners. I saw the old men wandering round the derelict churchyard where they exercise and take the air.

The story was of a great poet, jilted by the woman he loved, penniless, and sent into the Chelsea workhouse. One day, when wandering idly round the garden, knowing he was a failure, he saw a broken crucifix set up amongst the graves and suddenly realized that the symbol of our faith is of a Man in His hour of apparently supreme failure. The poet wrote his greatest poem and was ultimately salvaged from the garden by the woman who had jilted him (she being a snob and hoping to get some reflected kudos). But he spent all his time in the King's Road, Chelsea, staring in at the garden from the roadway.

I sent this to Mr. Edwards, who published it a couple of days later. On the Sunday a sermon was preached

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about it, it brought in a huge letter-bag, more than any other story that they had ever published, and it had a lot of publicity.

Langley Edwards sent for me.

I stood there looking at him, not believing that this really could be happening to me personally at all, and *inside* Northcliffe House. He wanted six more stories. The price was twenty-five guineas a time!

On the way home I bought a lot of cigarettes and pushed them through the railings into the church-yard of Chelsea Institution. I had difficulty because it is really out of reach, but I felt that they had earned them. I hadn't.

However, writing does not always go along as smoothly as all that. A couple of the stories were published, the other four delivered, when quite suddenly Langley Edwards died. The next thing that happened was completely horrifying, for back came the commissioned work, with a stereotyped little note, saying that they were unsuitable and were therefore being returned, and he was yours very truly, Cecil Hunt.

This, I felt, was a bit too much! Blast Cecil Hunt, whoever he is! said I to myself. The stories had been written to the order of Langley Edwards, he had accepted them, and in a wax I boarded the number eleven 'bus in my best hat, and went off to do battle. I was set down at Fetter Lane.

At Fetter Lane the first of my ardour had cooled considerably, and I realized that it was folly to start a row with a new editor, and only get myself disqualified for his duration; at the same time it was no good letting him treat me like a doormat. I took a look at Lord Northcliffe's bust outside St. Dunstan's-in-the-West, and muttering rudery about Cecil Hunt, plunged formidably down Bouverie Street.

Bouverie Street was now no new adventure to me,

but I still loved the smell of it; the throb of the presses and the gay little delivery vans darting here and there, and the printers who called after me, "What cheer, Gertie?"

Incidentally I suppose fame came the day that one of the packers as I passed, held up a paper with my picture in it, and said "What ho, Ursula!" though at the time I was very huffed.

Mr. Glover received me, and very splendiferous he was; his sciatica was having a good spell, which boded well for Mr. Glover, and for me too. As I filled in the little card, I said, "There you are, but I don't suppose he'll see me."

"Well, I think he will; he's a very nice young gentleman indeed," said Mr. Glover.

Five minutes later a boy came down to trot me up. Cecil Hunt would see me.

This of course was even worse than I had expected, because I was now rapidly cooling, and was beginning to get very frightened, nice young gentleman or not-so-nice young gentleman. It is never very wise to go brazenly into the lion's den to have the argument out, and I did not like the work in hand one bit. Up I went, and along the fateful corridor, and, with memories of Gwen Gilligan's little games, wondered if Cecil Hunt, whoever he might be, was about to palm himself off as being his own secretary.

He was young and so unaffected and natural that I could not help but appreciate it. I stated my case. He gave me his. He said that he had come into office to find a cartload of manuscripts, and every single author declared that they had all been commissioned.

Horrified, I said, "Yes, but Mr. Edwards really *did*."

He looked me through for a moment, then he said, "I believe you. I'll use the stories."

I was most touched that he did realize that I was speaking the truth; nothing would have been easier

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than for him to doubt me, and just as I was doing so well in the new market; I should have been quite shattered. I plucked up courage to ask if I might offer more. He said that for the moment he had so much that he simply did not know which way to turn, but if I would wait a couple of months, then he would like to see more.

"About when?" I asked, nothing if not business-like.

He laughed. I think he saw how really keen I was, and it amused him. On the identical day that he had stated, he found a manuscript of mine lying on his desk, and he took it. Cecil Hunt and I were to become the greatest friends.

I must confess I did play one frightful trick on Cecil Hunt. It was business, I suppose, but I've always felt ghastly about it. I had a book coming out called *The Secret Lover*. Now *The Secret Lover* had been Michael Joseph's plot, and he had helped me considerably with working it out. It was a good book, the best I had yet written, in fact I could not possibly have written it alone. Incidentally on the day of publication I sent Michael a little telegram of grateful thanks, and got back more than I bargained for. He sent me one, to the hotel where I was staying; they opened it (the pigs!), and it read:

Delighted to be associated with you and your secret lover.

Which was not quite so good!

Cecil Hunt wanted a serial for the *Mail*. We lunched out together in Frith Street, and I gave him an outline of the book. It *was* a good plot, a very good plot. It had excellent curtains, and he became interested. He asked if I could get a copy to him quickly. I told him it would be on his desk when he got back to the office after

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his lunch, if he would let me make one telephone call. He did. I telephoned to Curtis Brown's about it. It so happened that the powers-that-be were in.

They said, "Now don't you fix a price, leave that to us, or you'll drop a packet. Refer him to us."

I didn't like doing this. Cecil was a friend, and it seemed so mean to hot him up on a price. He offered me two hundred, or two hundred and fifty, I forget which, and I was dying to be fair, but after all, I would never have dared to show my face inside C.B.'s again if I had gone against them. I said I hated talking prices. He said he did, too, but we had got to come to some arrangement. I tried fobbing him off with well-see-what-you-think-of-it-you-may-hate-it, but he seemed to be rather insistent. In the end I had to be truthful.

"I must leave it to my agents," I said.

That night they telephoned me, and they'd shot the price sky high! I felt I ought to get on to the telephone and crawl in the dust to Cecil about it. It was my husband who said I was a fool.

"Don't you ever grasp that it is business, and anyway it isn't Cecil's own money?" he asked.

For a long time I wondered if he would lose his job on what he had paid me for the serial, and I got agitated. I needn't have worried myself at all.

I didn't break the *Mail* with my serial, neither did I get him the sack, in fact as far as I know the thing ran quite smoothly, and *The Secret Lover* was a success.

But the credit ought to have gone to Michael Joseph, who is a brilliant writer, and who was doing his best to take me under his wing and teach me the things that I did not know about writing. Their name was legion.

In the years that followed I did a lot of work for the *Daily Mail*, and the woman's page editor was a great friend of mine, in fact it was I who had put her up for the job. When the post was becoming vacant, Sir

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George Sutton interviewed me about it; he was charming, and he asked me if I had ever thought of becoming an editor myself. Horrified, I said "Good heavens, no!" I could hardly tell him of my one great field of editorial activity, the *Playfellow*.

He harped on it a good deal, and was obviously trying to push the *Daily Mail* woman's page in my direction. The salary was exciting, but, as I said, I would lose terribly by it. I was now earning a good couple of thousand a year, and more, and if I was stuck in an office all day I could not possibly get through my commitments, and said so. For a time he seemed to think that it was a matter of offering a bit more, but I had to disillusion him. Besides, I should have been the world's worst editor, even if I had been shepherded through the initial difficulties and taught the job.

Thank God, I do know some of my limitations, not all of them, I admit, but just some.

So Enid got the job and very ably she carried it out, and well she did by it.

Now, quite suddenly, I was climbing. I was going up fairly quickly.

CHAPTER TEN

What fun is fame,
And what a game!

IT was on an absolute fluke that I took the final lurch up the ladder.

I had written a potty little article for the *Daily Sketch*, dealing with myself when young, when I used to go rabbiting with my pug-dog, and, making a mistake in the address, it went by accident to the Author's Advisory Service. I had never heard of this literary agency, but my mistake in sending them this MS. was, so it turned out, the best mistake I ever made.

Rupert Crew, who together with his brother, Frank, ran the agency, politely returned the MS. but asked if I would be so kind as to give him the chance of handling it, as he was convinced that he could effect a good sale with it.

Now my experience with agents for short work had not been very profitable, and I had tried several of them. I found them always full of the wildest optimism at the beginning, an optimism which later they found it hard to substantiate. They sat on manuscripts for months, returning them eventually, so tired, dirty, and out of date that they were useless to me or anybody else. I didn't like agents for this type of work and I said so.

But I can sell it, he wrote.

They always say they can, but can't, I wrote back.

Will you let me prove to you that I *can* sell it? he asked.

No I won't, I wrote, because I know you can't!

Agents had helped me enormously with books, and I take off my hat to dear C.B. of Henrietta Street, but I

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had long ago decided that when it came to my short work, I was my own best agent.

"So have other people," said one editor, with inference!

I let that pass!

Rupert and I kept up this argument for a solid week, when I could stand it no longer (he seemed to be the most tenacious young man), and I wrote back with the manuscript rather on the principle of well-take-the-thing-and-blood-be-on-your-own-head!

It appeared in print the very next day.

What was even more surprising was that he landed it bung-ho on to the centre page of a newspaper that had already refused it, with a lot of extremely impolite remarks!

What was more surprising still was that every one of the six subsequent articles that he asked for, appeared in new markets the size of which horrified me, and all so easily that I swooned with amazement.

The young man could do it!

He was different from the usual agent; he would find a market, fog out a title, and get his author to write him an article round that title, giving a few directions to make sure that he didn't go wrong. It was too easy.

I went round to see this amazing office. Rupert and Frank Crew were then in Warwick Court. This was nothing more or less than an olde-worlde garret with a lovely view of Grays Inn, and it never gave you any idea of the amount of work done there. It looked small, even amateur, and quite ordinary.

I enquired closer.

In his teens, Rupert had discovered that he had a flair for putting MSS. into the right niche. He read magazines easily from this angle, and had pushed many a literary friend in the right direction. He had come to the conclusion that it was silly to go on doing this for the fun of the thing only, and he started an

agency. And oh, what a red-letter day it was for me when I addressed my MS. wrongly and fell in with Rupert *entirely by mistake!*

Within three months Rupert Crew had shot me up in the world. I was in every paper and could not believe it. I saw photographs of myself bobbing up from all manner of pages of print, pages that I had never expected and would never have dared to tackle. It was the beginning of the thin end of the wedge, and I was now reaping the harvest of years of hard sowing, how hard, I doubt if people have ever realized.

People recognized me in 'buses. I had always thought that this would be the top of the ladder, but it isn't quite as good as that. I became most disconcerted when people beside me opened their morning paper, saw my photograph, then suddenly looking up, beheld me in person. I needn't have worried. Half the photographs were over-flattering anyway. The public reaction is usually "Well, of course it *can't* be." My first glow of pride was submerged in a horror of shyness, because I never have been able to take affably to publicity.

I know once I was in the train going down to Portsmouth where my husband was stationed, when two young girls, the only other occupants of the carriage and complete strangers to me, started chattering.

"I know Ursula Bloom," said one. I darted a quick look at her, and certainly had never seen her before in my life, so was horrified. Her next remark horrified me even more; "And I know where she gets her hair dyed," she said.

I retired behind my evening paper.

It was almost as bad as the time when, a middle-aged couple approaching me, I heard her say to him "That's Ursula Bloom"—one gets rather quick at catching one's own name—and he, staring at me dully, said disappointedly, "Oh, she doesn't look clever, does she?"

Rupert Crew was a mascot to me.

He had not been used to exceptionally business-like writers, and appreciated my promptitude. I had never developed the article field, which now he thrust upon me. He was out for big stuff.

I hardly know what the first signs of fame are. Sometimes I wonder. One works so hard that one is blind to the passing of the milestones. Was it when *Candleshades* ran into several editions? When my name leapt on to the cover of big magazines? When my boy at school, hearing a fellow remark on "Ursula Bloom being 'somebody,'" replied with, "Don't be silly, she isn't anybody, she's my mummy!"? Or that foggy day when I stood at the window of my Battersea flat and saw flash by me on the front of a bus

URSULA BLOOM
in
To-day's so-and-so.

I stared at it. That can't be me, surely that can't be me? I said.

But it *was* me!

Suddenly Rupert had a job for me. I had written an article called *And Afterwards*. It was a shortish article, on common-sense conjecture as to what really will happen when we die. The man in the street is interested in what eventually must happen to himself, and I offered this to *Pearson's Weekly*, who didn't like it. Rupert asked for it, and I sent it along, and the next Sunday there it was in the *Sunday Express*.

This did not impress me too wildly, I was getting used to Rupert by this time, but the article brought in a lot of correspondence, and Rupert rang me up to say "John Gordon wants you to go along and see him. Are you free at three o'clock today?"

I am always free for, but not with, any editor!

To the offices of the *Sunday Express* I went, and was shown up into John Gordon's room. I wasn't frightened. It sounds queer, but I had got over the first sickly feeling of terror whenever I had actually got inside a newspaper house. He had Lord Castlerosse with him, one of the largest men I have ever met, but nice. John Gordon came straight to the point. He had liked the article, his readers had liked it, and wanted more. He wished to know what more I could do in this line.

I confessed to a keen interest in a religion for the man in the street, and also that I had read a good deal about religions in general, which have always intrigued me. He asked me bluntly if I could tackle a series. I *would* have tackled anything of course, whether I could or couldn't, that would have made no difference to my ambitions. I think John Gordon rather rumbled this.

"Now look here," said he, "you do me a sample article, write me one about who made God."

I was far too thrilled to realize that this was a bit of a poser. "Certainly," said I.

This seemed to amuse Lord Castlerosse very much.

I consented to write fifteen-hundred words on who made God, and, what was more, John Gordon really believed that I could do it (in which he was ultimately proved to be right), and off I went in one of my idiotic seventh heavens.

Going down in the lift, I said to myself, by the bye, I wonder who *did* make God? and suddenly came to, realizing what I had let myself in for! But I wasn't going down on it! With a series at stake, I was not going to chuck in my hand. After all, God got there somehow or other, and it was up to me to find out an argument as to how, when, and where.

I ran straight out of the doors of the *Express* into Wyatt Tilby. You know, I *do* have luck. Nobody can say that I don't. A great deal comes from sheer hard work, but I *do* have luck all the same. He had read *And*

Afterwards, and thought I'd got hold of something. I told him what had just happened upstairs in the *Express* offices, and the poser that I had been set. He laughed.

"Take a tip from me," he said. "Apply Einstein to that. The circle of eternity as against the straight line of the finite."

He was the straw that the drowning man clutched.

I went home and wrote the article; I wrote it carefully, for I was groping in a darkness where many have been lost, and I'd got to go slow. Next morning John Gordon found it waiting for him on his desk.

I think it shook him a bit!

The result of this was that for the next year I contributed a fortnightly article on religious matters to the *Sunday Express*. I was now on a new job. I liked John Gordon immensely; he is a most sincere man and always the same, but James Douglas was on the paper, and I felt that I was treading very close to his toes. In the toe-treading game, I should be the one who'd go for six—and ultimately did.

Writing religious articles is interesting, and it does help some people a lot, but oh, what a dreadful fan mail it produces! A fanatical fan mail at that. The letters swung between this sort of thing:

How dare you praise God when there is no such person, as I know to my cost? The wicked prosper in this world. My landlord is a heathen and he prospers. Get off the paper and don't let's have any more of your lies, they make me sick.

Signed by some such name as "Laura the Tigress", or "A Champion for Fair Play", or "Mother of Three Brave Sons". Then the other swing of the pendulum:

You must indeed be an angel and may God bless you and preserve you. I wish I were as good as you are. Please accept this basket of fruit from the nursery gardens where I work.

Simple Countryman.

Some of these letters were eye-openers to me. I answered every one that I could, and always those from people in real trouble, but it would take a whole morning to reply to my fan mail, and was more than I could manage with all my other work. It meant of course a heavy overtime routine, which I did not relish too much. After all, one must have some spare time, and a writer goes stale if she doesn't have something beside her work. Life was now strenuously docketed into definite working hours. Fan Mail, Winifred, *Be My Friend*, Articles for immediate markets. Stories. Then in the evening two solid hours a day to the novel in hand.

The Log of an N.O.'s Wife was my first bright light in the book world. I wrote it for fun, on one of my infrequent holidays, just to show my husband the sort of thing that Naval wives had to put up with. I had had some of it, tagging around at the tail end of a man-o'-war, in a cargo boat, or a mail boat, in this and that, and usually with some quite frightening people.

What had been a good deal worse, had been the reaction to myself of the Naval wives, who were very "For God, King and Country", and looked it—particularly country!

Quite early on, when I had married a mere wart of a Lieutenant-Commander, I was made to feel my place; I considered my place was on my own two feet, and after all I had done something with my life, which most of them hadn't, save to get married, which I could have done a dozen times over. My trouble had been to stop myself from getting married again, which was much more difficult.

I was not prepared to give up the career which they despised just to become friendly with a lot of women whom I found, in the majority, rather dull, and mercifully I was not alone in this.

I actually had a friend who persuaded her husband to

NO LADY WITH A PEN

retire from the Service because she simply couldn't stand the Naval wives. What a record!

I wrote my book, which was the first one I had ever done in the first person, and thank goodness I could laugh at myself, and so could Robbie. He was so amused that he said it would be a shame to keep it so to speak "in the family", and before I knew where I was, I was in London at the publishers and interviewing Roddy Rich (late R.N.) who wanted to publish the *Log*.

He thought that it was fun! He thought also that the man to illustrate it was Charles Grave, who was on *Punch* doing Naval skits, and so he persuaded Charles to come down to Portsmouth where I was living at the time. It was during Navy Week. Navy Week is to Portsmouth what Wakes Week is to Stoke-on-Trent. It buzzes.

Charles wanted local colour, both for *Punch* and for the *Log*, and I should think that he got it. Although he had the worst possible gout, he tottered into the dock-yard, and really his progress was just from bollard to bollard, but he would go on. He was terribly amused on board the *Nelson* by the old lady with the gamp who wanted to know where Horatio fell! He lunched with us in the ante-room on board the *Hood*, which was alongside and most unfortunately open to visitors. They kept going through the ship all the time, and what remarks they made! Few people seem to realize that a ship is the home of the men on board her. They precipitated themselves into cabins and came out screaming that they'd "seen a bloke undressing." They were amazed at the bakery. Crowds kept filing past the ante-room, and looking in through the scuttle, some of them actually holding up their children to "have a look at them what's inside."

At last Charles Grave threw a banana at one of them!

He did the illustrations for the book, and everything was going fine, when all of a sudden horror swooped

down on us. Roddy Rich wrote a polite note asking if I had the duplicate MS. by me. When publishers ask that I always get the jitters, because I am one of those poor boobs who do not keep duplicates. I have had to live so much in hotels that honestly there isn't the room. I either have to keep duplicates, or forego my undies, and I prefer my undies. I trusted to luck and the Lord being on my side, and on this occasion both let me down with a wallop. Someone had committed a glorious error, and God knows where the original manuscript had got to.

"Of course you have another?" said Commander Rich in agony.

"Of course I have *not*," said I, but, nothing daunted, "I'll write it again!"

I had to re-write the entire manuscript.

The published *Log* is not the original one, that has gone into a garbage bucket, or a fire, or something from which there is no return. I don't know where. But I did it again, and with, I hope, not too much fuss.

The very first reviews told me that I was on a good thing. Three editions were run through in a fortnight, a fourth in progress, and everybody (save the distaff side of the affronted Navy) thought that it was most humorous.

My six copies arriving from the publishers, I committed the sin of lending one to an Admiral who wanted something to read on a train journey to Greenock. At that time I was so joyous about the book, which I did think, and still do think, was very funny, that I never realized that he might go quarter-deck on me. He took it, and I had always thought that he was such a very nice Admiral, but he returned from Greenock a very red Admiral indeed.

And I had only given a few facts; nothing like the facts that I could have given. The hotels where one must not sit in Mrs. Commander's chair; going through

doors in the order of your husband's seniority; being pulled up for not talking about my clothes as the rig-of-the-day. At first I had thought that somebody was trying to be funny, but it wasn't humour, it was Naval distaff discipline.

I had recorded some of their better efforts at treating me as a cross between a tweeny and a young woman in a post office (not with conspicuous success), and I hoped I had not done so with bitterness but with humour, which perhaps had been all the more galling!

Later that year, I was on board ship and having rather a good time with the Merchant Service, who thought that the book was a gem. Another Admiral talking to me accused me of disloyalty in writing it.

"To what?" I asked.

"To the Navy, of course," said he.

"But I've never been in the Navy. I'm a journalist and always dead loyal to Fleet Street."

That unnerved him. "Yes, but the *Navy*," he insisted in an outraged voice.

"Look here," said I, "you are old enough to know that a man cannot serve two masters. You stick to Beatty and I'll stick to Beaverbrook, and we'll call it a day," which of course was exactly where we both got off.

The *Log* did very well. It was fun and it was the foundation stone for the later books written by No Lady, of which this is one.

In Fleet Street you have nearly always got several irons in the fire at once, and never know which one will come out red hot, or which will go cold on you. This life is adventure; you never know what tomorrow will bring about.

Unfortunately, becoming well known has singular disadvantages, particularly for a shy woman, and before very long it dawned on me that I couldn't stay dumb.

Everybody else seemed to be capable of getting up and making stirring speeches, surely I could not be the only woman in the world to go jittery? I had got to master this, as I had had to master a good many other difficulties in a struggling career.

It was Nellie Tom-Gallon who persuaded me, suggesting that I should make a start at the Thursday Club, which would be "all among friends." I don't know that it was really the best idea; I think one's friends are more difficult to speak to than one's enemies.

They were having a little speechifying afternoon on what constituted the best-seller. Ralph Straus was speaking from the critic's viewpoint, Alan Lane as the publisher (*The Bodley Head*), and it was suggested that I should speak as the novelist. I longed to say no, but knew that at some time, somewhere, I had got to clear this completely terrifying hurdle, and that it might as well be now.

Anyway, it was a whole solid month ahead, and it could not be long enough for me!

I started arguing in my own mind that it would be easily possible to die in the meantime, and so never have to speak at all. Judgment Day has let me down so often that I kept that out of the picture; you can't rely on it. Or Robbie might want me to start for Malta, where he was stationed, or perhaps I'd get ill. I thought of all these things with courage and hope, because then I could have had all the honour and glory of having said I'd do it, yet could have extricated myself on a perfectly legitimate excuse.

At the end of a fortnight it dawned on me that the fateful day was fast approaching, and that I was in for it. There wasn't going to be any getting out, worse luck!

I wrote out a small speech (I was only booked to speak for a couple of minutes) and I thought that it read rather well, so started committing it to memory.

I do not memorize easily. I used to learn it in my bath, which naturally spoilt every bath I had for that fortnight, and I love my bath, too! It was always getting contaminated with the soap, or falling into the bath itself, and having to be re-typed. It was not successful.

Having memorized it thoroughly (and I had to give it an extra hard doing in case the jitters so paralysed me that everything fled me), I then started to rehearse the beastly thing. I recited it twice nightly to the chest-of-drawers in my bedroom. I spoke it in my bath; once a passer-by stopped, and tapped on the door to ask if I was quite all right, so I had to give that idea up.

The awful day arrived.

I had had by now to go to the doctor, who gave me a sedative to calm down my agony, and suggested a swig of crême-de-menthe ten minutes beforehand, it being the only stimulant I can take without getting disgustingly intoxicated. I have a noodle of a head when it comes to booze. But with the licensing laws what they are in free England, it wasn't so easy to get the crême-de-menthe at the right moment. I dressed myself in a particularly attractive frock and hat, and, feeling like death, arrived in Manette Street.

Naturally it had got to be a bigger gathering than usual, with several of the friends I disliked most collected together there. Things never run according to plan. I wanted a quiet corner, where I could retire and rehearse my speech, now crushed and crumpled in my bag, but could find none. G. B. Burgin offered me a couple of extra large pears, and this time I really *had* to say no thank you. It's bad enough anyway to have to get up to make your maiden speech, but with two of G. B. Burgin's enormous pears in your hand, quite impossible!

Tea was served. It seemed to take an interminable time, during which I went hot and cold by turns. Ralph Straus was to speak first, all very informally with no

platform but just standing by a table at the end of the room. It was to be a little talk rather than a speech, but that was no good to me, I could only do my "piece". I'd written my piece, I'd rehearsed my piece, and my damned piece it was going to be, or nothing!

I implored Ralph Straus to be quick through his, or I thought that I should die, and he was awfully obliging and very brief indeed, making the way as easy as ever he could for me. He finished. Some cad beckoned to me. I walked across the room to the table, definitely not on air! Supposing a suspender snapped with a crack, or a fateful string burst, and worse befell me? Ghastly possibilities of this nature suddenly precipitated themselves into my agonized brain. Horror! I had turned and faced my so-called friends; how I hated them all!

Paralysed with agony, I heard a thin small voice which I never recognized as being my own, starting to say my piece (running time, one and a half mins. Time to me, one and half hours!).

I'd said it!

The feeblest applause came as I stood down for Alan Lane. He pressed my hand in passing. "Anyway, you looked lovely," said he, and started to talk with the utmost ease as though he was actually enjoying it.

Never again, I swore.

"You'll never be any good at it until you get away from notes," said Nellie Tom-Gallon, "it'll come to you in a flash. Memorizing like a parrot doesn't work."

"I'm so frightened," I said.

"Oh, you'll get over that," said Nellie, but I don't think I ever have done.

The next doing I had was at the Eustace Miles (vegetarian) restaurant in Chandos Street, where I was chairwoman, with very little idea of the duties that this entailed, and a young speaker who had never spoken before and ought never to have spoken now, for he

made a shockingly bad speech which I had to wind up for him.

He had also made the major mistake of bringing his dog with him, and leaving it in charge of some completely strange girl at the back of the room; the dog loathed the nut cutlets and barked wildly every time that his master spoke, which did not facilitate matters.

That was another better-forgotten afternoon, though this time *he* dropped the major brick, and a good old walloper it was! I spoke later in the same restaurant myself, in a room with some high-falutin' name like the Green Salon (somebody said because they served so much green stuff in it), but I spoke on starting work in Fleet Street, which I *could* talk about, and found much easier.

Before very long the Foyle Luncheon wanted me, though I hadn't the least inclination to go. I had refused so often from sheer funk that suddenly when Christina implored me to take Madeleine Carroll's place at a moment's notice, or almost a moment's notice, I really had to go.

Naturally it was the record lunch for numbers. I had Joe Gaute, from Hutchinson's, with me, and my son; they thought it fun, I was past thinking! I've never eaten less, and I had to sit and listen to two men making long speeches preceding mine. Then the desperate moment came.

The resplendent Toastmaster in scarlet swam towards me with the mike in his hand, and meaning in his manner. Now, thought I, I know why bulls dislike red! I must have been a bull in another existence. Grim hands were on the back of my chair, in another moment he would slide it away from me, and I'd have no option but to go under the table or rise to my tottering feet.

"Pray silence for Miss Ursula Bloom," he bawled, determined that all the world should hear him.

They did hear him.

An arc lamp switched on to my agonized face, everyone turned to look at me as I rose with a constricting throat, a couple of camera men nipped up to the other side of the table with unabashed bravado, and clicked right under my nose. Applause began. They wouldn't applaud when they heard what I had got to say, I thought desperately. For a few awful minutes I faced the horror of Grosvenor House, with what I myself felt to be a scarlet beast standing behind me, laughing in all the right places, listening attentively, looking grave where the lines indicated it, and frightening me stiff.

It was over. I sat down. The arc light switched to someone else, God help him.

"For Heaven's sake give me a whisky and soda," I begged Joe Gaute. The only time in my life.

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I tried to escape from the horror of speechifying, but it is one of those things from which, for the author, there is no escape.

Before very long I had to take myself off to the big cinema at Swiss Cottage, which had its programme interrupted, for a whole week, by well-known authoresses for a few minutes every day, I am sure to the fury of its audience, who hadn't gone there for that sort of tomfoolery.

A stall of my books was to be on display in the *foyer*, and a certain amount of publicity would be attached to my appearance there, which my publisher was very anxious to have. After all, one does belong somewhat to the publisher. He has put up a good deal of money to make you what you are, and if you sit back and flatly refuse to help him on any point it isn't conspicuously fair.

Pamela Frankau spoke the evening before me, Mickey Jacob earlier in the week, and both of them are very good speakers. If they can do it, you can, argued

the publisher, which seems all right on the face of it, but just doesn't apply to me, as I wanted to tell him.

I arrived on time.

Nobody in the *foyer* had heard of me, and they all seemed to labour under the impression that I had gone there with the one idea of getting inside without paying! I saw my name displayed in what I thought to be very small letters; probably this was vanity on my part.

"I'm that!" I said.

Eventually the error was unravelled, and I was wafted along to the managerial office. As I went I recognized a small table well concealed in a niche marked "Ladies"! That was where my books were!

Apparently there had been a mistake made about the time, and to my horror I found myself with forty minutes to wait, jittery with nerves and the awful prospect of having to appear, one small dot in an arc lamp on that frightfully big stage. I quaked. The manager was kind and chatted to me and did everything that man could do to put me at my ease, not realizing that he was on a sticky wicket. Nothing can ever put me at my ease when I am about to make a speech. I would have liked to seize my publisher by the throat, and tell him what a far far better thing I did for him now, than I had ever done before, and what was more I never would again.

Eventually we went behind the scenes. As I went through the back of the dress circle, groping desperately for confidence, somebody said "Who's that?" Another replied "That's Ursula Bloom." "Never 'eard of her," said the first one.

Feeling clammy I waited till the picture ended, seeing the back view of it from the wrong side of the screen, with a big space, and a lot of fire buckets, and notices as to not spitting. Also a few stage hands looked at me as though I was some odd aquarium species got here by

mistake, as in truth I began to feel that I had. The manager then introduced me, and I went before the curtain to the most half-hearted applause.

I don't believe anybody wanted to see me; they'd come here to see *Desert Romance*, not Ursula Bloom. I told them amusing little stories about myself and my career for ten minutes; I thought it far better than a speech, and as I was nearing the end of this I saw that a pageboy had taken up his stand in the wings, clasping an enormous basket of carnations. I never know what to do with pageboys; small children can be kissed, they generally hate it but it seems to be the only thing to do; what would happen if I kissed a cinema pageboy? I thought that he would probably say "Blimey" or "Give over," or something like that!

The moment I had finished, I was moving off, hoping that I didn't hurry this part too much from sheer relief, when the pageboy came marching on, saluted a puce pillbox hat, and gravely handed me the basket. The audience applauded thankfully, and I slid into the background a couple of dozen carnations the richer, whilst they now settled down comfortably to *Desert Romance*.

I went to help in the opening of a library at Brixton, or somewhere in that neighbourhood, a library in one of the big general stores. This had apparently been fixed up for the wrong day, for all the world and his wife was out shopping, and would not waste their time frolicking round embryo libraries listening to writers' chatter. When our little band arrived we were ushered upstairs into the model gown department, where a couple of rows of cane-seated chairs were set out and the room was conspicuously empty.

I rather hoped that nobody would turn up, and could have addressed the ladies' gowns a good deal more easily than an audience, but I wasn't going to be let off as

gaily as all that. The shop was so shattered by the lack of support that they hustled all the assistants together, and they had to sit on the cane-seated chairs, and listen to us with rapt expressions.

I imagine that if only the neighbourhood had been put wise to this performance they would have had a glorious time, for the would-be shop-lifters could easily have got in and made merry.

On the other hand, talking to writers' circles is fun. I always liked that, particularly one dinner at which Berta Ruck and I were guests of honour, with Owen Rutter (and we shall not look upon his like again) in the chair. Owen had the most charming personality and was entirely unaffected. He had once played a most amusing joke on Basil Tozer. Basil's wife was Madame Thamar, running the very attractive little beauty shop in Beauchamp Place; there she had her own factory and trained some charming girls in the cosmetic art. One of these spent a legacy on a cruise to Panama, and met Owen and his wife on the cruise. Owen, hearing all about it, asked her to dine when they got back to London, and also asked Basil, tempting him with the bait that he had a "most attractive girl coming to dinner." Of course Basil bit it, and the laugh was on him.

Owen had the habit of putting his speakers completely at their ease, nobody could feel shy when he was the chairman. That night I spoke quite naturally and without notes, just as Nellie had told me I should have to do before I was any good at all.

When I tried it the next time it was at some Jewish society in the East End, and it was a failure. One thing was quite certain, and that was that very few of the would-be writers in the room would ever get further than would-be's. Also, to add to the trouble, Hitler was making one of his ranting speeches, one of his very worst (for me quite the worst), and he started on the radio next door, completely shouting me down.

There was the bazaar I opened with Cecil Hunt in Manchester, a fête in Swindon for a very charming vicar. Beauty shows. Flower shows. Something of everything.

Beauty shows are a snag. The right girl never gets the prize. Once when I went to one from a friend's house I dropped a dreadful brick; their gardener had his best girl in the show. "Ever so lovely, miss," said he, "bound to take first prize, as you'll see." He thought that the first prize was as good as won.

When I got there, there was a row of young women and amongst them not one of even noticeable good looks. They had numbers on their arms. Which, oh which, thought I, is the gardener's best girl, because I'll never dare go home if she loses.

You cannot judge beauty contests by favouritism, and it is *not* always on what appears to the outsider to be good looks; you have to take bone structure into consideration, which outsiders never consider; a winner should win on points. I selected three girls, and went home well satisfied with myself, but of course the moment that I got inside the gate I knew that I had dropped a brick. News of the winners must have preceded my arrival, for the gardener was the picture of gloom.

"I'm very sorry," I said, "but you see I did not know the names, that would have been unfair. I had just to give it to the girls who won it."

He wasn't appeased. Apparently he had promised the girl to tip the casting vote in her favour, and I had failed him. He never forgave me.

When the war began I had all sorts of appearances to make. I think the most interesting were to do with the *Daily Sketch* Comforts Fund. I went down to Arding and Hobbs' to speak with Lady Oxford and Asquith, Mabel Constanduros, and Dennis Wheatley. It was the

greatest fun. We all met at their headquarters, which at that time had not been bombed out from 146 Piccadilly, and we went down in cars. Half Battersea had turned out for us, and they gave us a right royal welcome.

I made my speech turning the heel of a sock, because Robbie had bet me half-a-crown that I couldn't do it, but I could. The speech went so well that they dragged me on to another platform during tea to say something else, and it all seemed rather easy. I came away with Dennis Wheatley, who returned with me to my flat for a drink, and then we went on to the "Drene" show (I had written the booklet for them); they were giving a special party at the Ritz.

I remember that as being a very happy day, a red-letter day, a day when I wasn't frightened.

There was the time at Selfridge's when Princess Marie Louise came to superintend the meeting, and I by some awful miscalculation got myself stuck all alone on the platform (somebody had blundered in putting me there, and who was I to remonstrate?), when she and her procession came into the room.

She was sweet. She spoke so naturally, and then started receiving the parcels. There was an enormous queue of all the women in the world coming along with comforts parcels (I could not see how we were ever going to get through them), and there half-way along was a fat little boy of about twelve years old, scarlet in the face under a school cap, and clutching a parcel that obviously contained socks.

I thought to myself what-on-earth-is-that-child-doing-here? Because a knitting party is the sort of thing from which a boy that age would run a mile. No, he was all bent on it, moving up in strict rotation with the rest, and I with memories of my own son wondering what in the world he was after. I was soon to see. I had been quite right in conjecturing that knitting was not his *raison d'être*.

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The woman ahead of him moved aside, and the Princess looked a bit surprised to see him there (from where she stood, she couldn't have seen him before), but he doffed his cap, he'd got it all off pat, pushed the parcel towards her, whipped out an autograph book and said:

"Please, can I have your autograph!"

She was completely taken aback!

But oh, how nice she was! Remembering that Royalty doesn't give its autograph like this, I wondered what I was supposed to do, whether I ought to wheedle the little boy aside, suggest that he had mine, or gave him a bob to get some tea with, when she said "Of course you can," borrowed my fountain pen, and wrote in the book then and there! I thought it was so nice of her, and wished *I'd* had the nerve to ask, having an enormous autograph collection myself. In fact I did debate for a moment as to whether I could nip after the little boy, catch him, and bribe him to part with it; then first of all I felt that it was *infra dig* for me to do this, and secondly I saw no reason to suppose that he would part—he hadn't struck me as being that sort of little boy!

Harrods' National Savings Week.

Michael Redgrave and I signing savings certificates, I don't know why that made them any the more valuable, and I say this with no slighting inference on Michael Redgrave.

Mabel and I signing certificates, and then suddenly Mr. Burbidge telling me that the Duchess of Kent was coming that afternoon, and the woman who was supposed to be there to sign savings certificates, and to receive the Duchess, was ill and couldn't turn up. Please, would I help?

The difficult part was that this was the very afternoon that I had arranged an outing with my rather ancient father, who was not on the telephone. He was

eighty, and had only recently told me that he had never been inside Harrods' shop, and very much wanted to go. I had promised to meet him at the Knightsbridge Tube station, and take him on a tour of Harrods, showing him anything that he wanted to see.

"The difficulty is that my father is coming here," I said.

"Oh, we'll see after him," said Harrods very kindly. I knew they would.

"Oh, all right," said I, but was a little worried as I went off to the Tube to meet my papa. I did not quite know how he would take this; not too well, I was afraid. At eighty, old gentlemen don't care for being wafted about amongst strangers, however kind.

I had a little time to spare and rang up my husband who was on duty at the M. of I. They seemed to be an awful long while in getting hold of him, and time was running short, so I hung perspiring on to the public telephone in the box.

"Listen," I said when at last he came. (Not "Look!" as my son always says). "I'm having a most ghastly afternoon, I cannot begin to tell you what has happened to me."

"You're taking your father to Harrods, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"I pity you." Sympathetic man, my husband!

"It isn't only that. Something staggering has happened. It's the Duchess of Kent."

Silence whilst husband took an intake of breath, and then, "Now what *is* all this?"

"I can't get hold of Dad to stop him coming, and the woman who was to have received the Duchess of Kent this afternoon has ratted on them, so that I've got both of them on my hands. Yes, Robbie, *both* of them, Dad and the Duchess of Kent, and I . . ."

That was where I got cut off!

Helplessly I groped for the street again.

I met my father, who was wearing a grey flannel suit of a jaunty nature, the sort of peculiar, and rather eccentric, gear that old clergymen seem to delight in, to the utter confusion of their families. This sounds atrocious of me, I mean no disrespect to my father; old clergymen have these habits. He had on his summer hat, the one to which I had always taken particular exception, a cross between a boy baby's in a pram and the sort of thing an entomologist would wear. I can only suppose that he acquired it at a rummage sale. He was already hot and bothered by the journey, it was a tiring day and he felt the heat; besides, he was over eighty. When I told him what had happened, he appeared to think that the least I could have done was fob off the Duchess of Kent, and tell her as woman to woman that I had a prior engagement.

He was amenable, however, and I told him that for the first part of the show he would have to stay put in a corner, after which somebody kind would show him anything that he particularly wished to see in the building, and oh, I prayed Heaven that he would be all right! Personally I had thought that the aquarium would amuse him, but the distances in Harrods are large, and what did worry me was that the person who took him round, with the best of intentions, would over-walk my father in his anxiety to keep him amused.

Because at eighty my papa had the mind of eighteen years old, and would never have admitted that he was doing too much.

We got back to Harrods, and I installed him in a particularly large and comfortable armchair, which they had got all ready for him. I popped him in a corner where he could have a bird's-eye view of the proceedings. By which time I had the chance to collect myself for a moment or two, and just sufficient time to become raddled with nerves. There was one thing about it,

however, the Duchess of Kent when she did arrive would take all eyes off me, which was something!

She came in looking utterly charming, with the powers-that-be, and I curtseyed solemnly. I thought "Pray Heaven Dad gets out of that chair. Will he have the sense to stand up? What shall I do if he doesn't? What *shall* I do?" and as I went down, out of the tail of my eye I glanced in agony at the chair, and was just in time to see Papa, who had made a valiant effort to get on to his feet, flop back again helplessly. The chair was too low for him! Also I realized now that he had come in those frightful gym shoes to which he adhered so faithfully.

This is awful, I thought.

The performance went through without a hitch. Occasionally when I glanced in his direction I could see one aged father becoming extremely bored. The dreadful business was that there was absolutely nothing that I could do to help him, and I knew he would feel that I ought to have done something. The thing, once started, had to be gone through.

Then my father disappeared (I thought to myself now-what's-happened-to-him?), but I found him again when the performance was over, and the Duchess and her lady-in-waiting had been bowed away and off to their next appointment. Papa had done a tour of the building, taken by very kindly helpers, and was now having a hearty tea at Harrods' expense in their café. He had found an old friend there, and was enjoying himself very much indeed.

Thank Heaven for that, thought I.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The pen goes on and on, you'll find;
No Lady follows on behind.

ONE morning Rupert Crew rang me up at my flat in Cranmer Court. "Want you to go along to the *Sunday Pic.*," said he, "there's something there for you, Cudlipp's the name."

So along I went to Rolls Buildings, asked for Mr. Cudlipp, and was shown up to his office.

Mr. Cudlipp was the editor of the *Sunday Pic.*, young, interesting, and keen on the job. He wanted a page every Sunday, called *Woman to Woman*, with No Lady writing it. My instructions were to get something together in the course of the next day and bring it along to lunch with him and with Shirley Long at the Café Anglais.

I was a bit petrified. At that time I had not very much idea of the sort of thing they would want; when I got away I rang up Rupert, who as usual gave me some sort of an outline. I fogged it out that afternoon, knowing that a good deal depended on it. I lunched at the Café Anglais, and over the coffee went through the horror of watching them reading my MS. whilst I looked at other women's hats, and wished I were dead, amongst a few other things.

I got the job.

On the following Sunday every 'bus in London had my picture on it. And well I knew it, because I had chosen that day to take my father down to Mickleham in the car with Robbie. As we were going along behind a 'bus, and I (with some sort of modest conceit) had rather hoped Dad would notice the passing 'buses, I drew his attention to the picture just ahead of him.

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"Have you seen that?" I asked him.

"No," said he, without interest.

Stung a bit, I said "That's me."

He said, "Oh, is it? I don't think it's very good of you," and immediately looked in the opposite direction. Such is fame in one's own family! I don't know whether he was keeping up the old *Playfellow* attitude towards my work, or what it was, but although I believe he was extremely proud of me to other people, certain it is that if faint praise could have damned me, I'd have been damned all right.

I found that the *Sunday Pic.* wanted to send me out on quests for them. One of the first was to Tonypandy, in the Rhondda Valley, to look into the life of the miners there. I had been a good deal to North Wales, which I love, but not to South Wales before, and off went Robbie and I in the car, typewriter tucked into the back, because the conditions I found were to be written up and dispatched to Rolls House the moment I had seen what I wanted to see.

I had an introduction to the police station down there, and turning up on time, found them utterly charming. Don't ever tell me that the Welsh are unpleasant! It isn't true. I went into the miners' houses, and there I saw conditions that almost made my heart bleed. How those people managed to live through such ghastly times I don't know. That they did, alone proves their worth.

They were charming folk, most natural and most kind. I went into one or two houses and had tea at the police station, which was very homely and pleasant. I'll never forget how awfully kind they all were. Then I got out into the country and Robbie backed the car into a blind alley (or so we thought) of a lane, and I got the typewriter out and wrote the article to be expressed to the office.

Of course, just as I was going along full steam ahead

a boy with a wagon came round the corner. He took one frightened look at me and the typewriter, dropped his mouth in horror, and fled. I don't know what he thought I was doing!

For the *Sunday Pic.* I did the Chelsea Rose Show, which I adored; I went down to the Mission of Hope, surely one of the most deserving charities we have, and I loved every minute of my work for them.

For three months I sent in the page every week, during one ideal Spring when the headaches that have afflicted me so cruelly for years now, were better, and made life so much easier.

Meanwhile *Be My Friend* was still chugging along, and looked like chugging along for ever. Every morning of my life I dealt with my "friends" first of all. Suddenly the office rang up. The editor of the paper had been given *Woman's Own* and wanted a beauty editor.

"A beauty editor?" I gasped.

"Now don't be silly," she said (she knew me very well), "you know quite well you could do it, and do it excellently. Off you go!"

I've always been very interested in chemistry, in beauty in general, and have had rather a flair for clothes. I said "I'd love the work, it would be the greatest fun, but with all my other work . . ."

She wouldn't stand for any rot like that, and there I was; it has been the most enjoyable job!

I applied myself diligently to it. There was a great deal to learn, and the first thing to do was to make some notes. I went from one beauty shop to another. I'd known Madame Thamar intimately for years, and she was a great help to me; one after another I waffted from this salon to the next, Elizabeth Arden, Helena Rubinstein (gay scarlet coats on white frocks here), Adelaide Grey, Phyllis Earle, all of them. The acid test was to find the goods the public wanted. The first wild

success was with a reducing chocolate—I must have sold hundreds of pounds of it. We were completely swamped with letters about it. So many women wanted to reduce and couldn't comfortably, but the idea of eating a nice chocolate and being reduced in consequence was just too good!

Then it was getting eyelashes dyed at a reasonable cost, then an acne cure. One after another I became absorbed in the discoveries that I rootled out. I was very fussy. When in doubt I went into matters closely, because I wanted to be quite sure. I had got it into my head that a first-class beauty editor, on whose word the public could rely absolutely, would be bound to have a big pull. I wanted to build up the page little by little, not go at it in a rush with a lot of disappointments. If I said a thing was good, it *was* good.

Once my son at college said, "One of our chaps wrote to you about his spots, and you told him of some stuff; you'd have an awful surprise, but it's done the trick."

Coldly I replied, "I should have no surprise at all. If it didn't do the trick, I wouldn't expect the firm to pay me to write their page for them."

He looked at me amazed. "But surely," he said, "that sort of thing is only for *fun*?"

That's what your family thinks of you, most of your friends too! You would be surprised at the young women I meet wearing the wrong make-up, who tell me they must get some really *good* advice about their powder and cream, because they look so awful, yet would never ask me. Every day of my life I am advising hundreds of other women about the very thing, and with some small success—I hope!

Beauty work is an unending and absorbing study. It isn't just writing the page and answering the letters; it is, in wartime, finding where goods are to be bought, getting knowledge about new properties about to be launched on the public, finding out if they are what they

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say, or say they are what they aren't; going into such things, getting more knowledge every day of your life, and applying it.

You have to be *learning* all the time.

Beauty is linked up with photography. The average person does not know how a writer is always having photographs taken and what an enormous expense they are to her. "Dear" readers are always writing in flatteringly, begging for a photograph, and it seems churlish not to do something about it. So I buy photographs a hundred at a time. That doesn't last very long.

You get very well used to being photographed, and as the paper wishes it. You'd be surprised how choosey readers can be, and how rude about the photograph that they don't like.

What a party it has sometimes been! I remember one afternoon in summer, the editor of the paper which ran *Be My Friend* came down to the country hotel where I was staying. It is a very charming hotel with a large lake in the garden, and all sorts of grounds, stretching away into the distance. Editor arrived with child and husband, and in the back a fat little photographer with every sort of gadget in the camera line that you can imagine. Naturally the guests of the hotel thought what great fun all this would be. Everybody, except myself, thought it the biggest spree that had happened for some time.

They took me sitting on a wall with fifty acres trailing behind me, and a huge lake before me. They took me entering the punt, having tea in the rose garden, entering the house, and of course what they forgot was that every reader in the world would think that it was *my* house, and write in, and tell me what a dirty dog I was to have been photographed scrubbing floors, etc., when quite obviously in this place there

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were far too many floors for any one woman to scrub. That was to come later!

Then of course husband, son and dog, were lured into it. Husband and son had been standing about on the fringe of all this, trying to make me laugh at the wrong moment, without success, because I was feeling too savage to laugh. I couldn't see anything funny in it at all, nor could they, when their turn came. What was the result? Photographs of me having tea with husband and son looking as though they were about to murder somebody, preferably me!

Those photographs were very charming, but they let me in for a lot of trouble. Readers took to the dear little dog, but by the time the photographs were published, the dear little dog had taken to slipping under hotel beds and snapping at chambermaids' ankles, which had made him so extremely unpopular that I had had to give him away.

The same thing had happened when I got my photo taken with the photographer's cat. People wrote and asked me what was the name of "my dear pussy-cat." Not liking to hurt their feelings, I invented a name for it; this led me into shocking difficulties; I forgot the name I had given the cat, and people wrote for Christmas asking me how dear Tutti-Frutti or whatever-it-was found himself. I wrote back asking what they meant, and was hoist with my own petard.

Then I was photographed drinking somebody's special tea, yet again in frocks that they wanted to advertise, though the most charming photographs that I have ever had taken were always by Angus McBean, who could do the job beautifully, and never made a fuss about it.

Then, of course, there was the photograph for the *No Lady in Bed* dust jacket. This dust jacket, the publishers said, ought to have a photograph of me in bed on it.

"Certainly," said I, "if you'll come along as pseudo-doctors."

They chewed the cud on this for a bit, obviously not liking the idea. I said no bed for me, if no doctors. After a bit they said they would, and Percy Bradshaw came to give a hand. On the eventful morning I had one of my most cracking headaches and felt terrible. A hypodermic was the only answer, and I could, after a couple of hours' rest, be relied upon to be coming round slowly, but whether I would be in good enough form for photographic purposes or not I didn't know. However, I determined I'd risk this.

I got Robbie to come to the studios with me, and off we tootled, the arrangement being that we were all to meet outside a pub which was next door. They were most punctual, and had arrived with a suitable stethoscope borrowed from the Charing Cross Hospital.

I said that I had a slight headache, but of course what I had not realized was the fierceness of the arc lamps, which would make it positively fiendish. However, I got through it!

It was a lovely photograph, and they looked the part, just the sort of couple I had had hovering round me at five guineas a time and doing nothing at all for years! But at the last hurdle, they got cold feet. Off their own bat, they thought they'd get their faces changed a bit! Percy Bradshaw aided and abetted them, and whereas I was left looking myself in bed, they went and got themselves made bald, given pug noses and Heaven knows what, so as to be quite unrecognizable.

"Why not give me a moustache?" I suggested. "That," they said with frigidity, "would spoil the whole thing!"

Then there was the photograph competition I had to judge. This was run by a well-known shop. They sold hats, and purchasers had themselves photographed in the hats they had bought (*in* the shop), and stood to win a handsome prize. The competition was "which

lady has chosen the hat that suits her best!" Now unfortunately the public got the wrong idea of the contest; they thought it was "which looked best in her hat," which wasn't the idea at all.

The worst were put aside by the firm, then one morning I went along to their offices and looked through the rest; there were quite enough of them, thank you very much! I chose a middle-aged woman, because it is more difficult for a middle-aged woman to choose a hat, and also because I thought she wouldn't expect to win. She would be almost sure to think that the girls would get it. I must say that she did look very nice in her hat.

Two afternoons later, I went along to give away the prizes. On this particular afternoon I had a friend with me who was spending the day with us, and my husband and son (neither of whom were very anxious to come, but didn't want to leave me) had to be brought along too. Norman Long was at the piano, and I was grateful for him.

All went brightly, I thought, the first prize-winner was surprised, but she looked even better than her photograph, and honestly had deserved it. I thought I had finished, when along comes the inevitable pageboy with large autumnal basket of this and that! I didn't know what to do with the basket, I wanted to go to the restaurant and have my tea, and not make myself additionally conspicuous with the basket. So I hid it *pro tem* in the model gowns, and collected it on my way down.

It sounds so dreadfully ungrateful, particularly from one who is passionately fond of flowers, but there is nothing more likely to make you conspicuous than a bouquet or one of those nice tall baskets of this-and-that. It is quite impossible to get away undetected, when hall-marked this way.

No sooner did I re-collect my basket than people started nudging one another, and saying "That's her!"

and the sort of things people do say under such circumstances. As we came downstairs into the haberdashery I thrust the basket into my son's hands.

"Here, you take it," said I.

"I'm damned if I do," said he, but he had it before he knew where he was, and I had disappeared. The last thing I saw round a corner of the shop was son, scarlet in the face, getting into a taxi with a basket nearly as tall as himself in his hands. After which I hardly dared go home!

The career was now practically set. Journalism was a fair field. At last I had learnt my lessons. I knew a little about it, I did not have to study a couple of hours every day of my life, which at one time I had had to do, to make sure that I was going to get somewhere.

"The first time I saw your books advertised in a Tube lift," said Wyatt Tilby, "I knew you were getting there."

I should never have recognized it then, perhaps I shouldn't have had time to see the advertisement, but I should never have thought *that* meant fame.

I had had publishing difficulties, lots of them. In nearly every writer's life there comes the horrible crisis when they want to change their publishers. Honestly I don't believe that one firm is better than another, I believe much depends on what they publish. Give them a good book, and, provided it is not extremely badly handled, I think it will get there. But of course some books *are* badly handled.

Perhaps this is because the publisher, poor man, is so set upon by his writers, and my sex is particularly bad at this! I like to leave my publisher alone; then I know if there comes a really urgent point, he will be far more ready to listen to me should trouble arise. I have never yet gone into a publisher's office with the idea of making a scene, as a lot of my friends have done, and pretty good scenes they've made too!

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It doesn't pay in the long run, putting it at its lowest, and it can't make a publisher any more anxious to make you a success.

I changed, and far more frequently than I wished, quite often through no fault of my own. How did I come to this particular publisher?

It was at the beginning of the war.

I was evacuated into the wilds, and very miserable I was. I lived in a hotel, and although it was an extremely good hotel, even the best get sickening after a time. In my misery (my husband was working in London and only down every other night), I started a book. It was the *Log of No Lady*. I didn't call it that then, I called it the *Log of a Lady*, undoubtedly flattering myself.

The book amused me a lot and, having got half way through, I sent a bundle of chapters along to the faithful C.B. The faithful C.B. wrote back that they had a publisher who would like it, and enclosed a contract. I wrote back on a postcard in verse, which I always do when particularly pleased, and there are some of my friends with whom I only correspond with in verse.

I thank the Goodness and the Grace
That on my birth has smiled,
And made me in this * * * * * place
A happy C.B. child!

The book went in, and the firm sent for me. As usual I tittered into Henrietta Street, but by this time I had got back to my flat, and was not feeling quite so *piano*. I hate interviewing new publishers, or editors, and always get cold feet. I popped in on C.B. first, and Spencer gave me the fatherly pat on the back, and sent me along saying, "Frightening? Good heavens, no! You'll like them." But then, as he always says that (and sometimes I don't like them), I wasn't feeling too assured.

But I did like them!

I liked them so much more than I expected.

The ordeal of their waiting-room horrified me in spite of the bust of Charles Dickens, because they publish a lot of books on pig iron and such. I cannot think who buys them. But once I was wafted upstairs, with every door opening the wrong way, it seemed, I felt a new girl.

What was more, I consented to write a series of novels for them under another name. Novels just as light-hearted and gay as the *No Lady* books.

"Now about a title?" said the powers-that-be, "do you like *Log of a Lady*?"

And suddenly, because I was feeling happy and at ease, I said, "I'd rather it was *Log of No Lady*."

He laughed very much. "Well, you said it; I didn't," he answered.

So No Lady was born in a publisher's room in Henrietta Street, with the sound of the costers in the Covent Garden market outside, and all those peculiar books on pig iron, and manure, and resin and such, in the waiting-room below. No Lady! I walked out of the office and up the street and along to the Ivy to lunch.

It's a long long way from seven pennyworth at Lyons' to the Ivy! From the Nippies there to Mr. Abel, and Mr. Mario, and Mr. Marconi. But I've come all that way. And on my own two feet, thank God!

But there have been difficulties. There have been too many changes of publishers. It hasn't always been my fault. I suppose there is something wrong with every publishing house, and a good deal wrong with every author too, anyway that is the way that it works out.

For years a publisher publishes for you; then with the contract running out you decide to go elsewhere. Either the advertising is bad, or they don't sell enough, or something worries you, and your agent informs them that "Miss Bloom is thinking of making a change."

What happens next?

Horror.

They find out if you have already signed up elsewhere, and when they find you haven't begin to take such an interest in you that you begin to wonder whether it is love. Hitherto you have hardly seen them and then only for the briefest moments; now, with the chance of quitting, they are on your doorstep. Their most persuasive publicity men come and hang about the place, they say that it is the cad's trick, that nobody with any decency at all would contemplate leaving them. You reply by mentioning your reasons. They talk you down.

Wherever you go you trip over them. You can't escape them. When you say "Oh do please go away, I've made up my mind," they adopt the attitude of what a brute you are.

They leave you in the end feeling a brute.

The last time I changed was perhaps the funniest of all. It was in an air raid. This seems to be quite unbelievable. It was the second night of the flying bombs, and I was really rather ill. I had a trained nurse with me, for my headaches had been ghastly, and I was in the throes of some offensive treatment or other. The idea had been to knock me out with an anæsthetic for a week; that was the very night that Hitler sent his first robots over.

The next night things were really fruity, they had been fairly fruity all day, and I got sick of my flat and the nurse and I went down to the first floor of our block. There is a long passage on the first floor, with no glass; you can sit there all night if you wish. The only night that I did this, I was parked between a retired admiral and a pekinese, and I don't know which snored worse. The admiral became so awful that my husband finally biffed a pillow in his face, not knowing who he was. Next day when I said "But he's an *admiral*," choking with laughter, Robbie (who is awfully for God, and

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King, and Country) said in an appalled voice. "My God! Why didn't you warn me?"

On this particular night I went down into the first corridor, nurse and all, with the most filthy racket of a raid going on above, and the Curtis Browns were sitting there looking forlorn in a huddle. So I sat with them. First of all I amused myself in counting out my clothing coupons with which I have been very mean all along, and therefore had a great deal more than anybody else, which seemed to enrage the other occupants of the corridor, so I put them back into my bag and shut up. Then we started talking about publishers. I said how sick I was of mine.

"Why don't you change?" said Jean.

"Who to?"

She named a name. I thought for a moment. "All right," I said.

"Send you along the new contract this week," she told me as the all-clear went.

So simple, wasn't it?

I have been had up for libel.

The laws of libel in England are not good or wise, they are not even fair. Anybody can sue you. I could do it for the next author and all within five minutes, merely say I associated myself with something unpleasant and the author would pay me out a hundred rather than fight it. By fighting libel you gain nothing at all. By fighting libel your expenses will be terrific, and you cannot claim damages from the other chap, which is just too bad.

I was said to have libelled a hotel by relating an incident that happened when I was staying there, and which I thought was very far from a libel and quite innocuous. It took the hotel some time to digest this, and presently I got a letter, and the publishers and the printers got letters, and poor old Robbie got one about

his wife's torts, which I thought meant something quite different but apparently doesn't at all.

Robbie didn't know what to do with his wife's torts. He laughed himself nearly sick at breakfast. I wasn't wildly upset.

Solicitors started getting busy.

The difficulty of employing any solicitor is that the moment you do employ him all his sympathies appear to be with the other side. It's a most extraordinary thing that they should take up this attitude. I'd give my ears for a really good fighting and blaspheming solicitor who goes all out to biff somebody.

Letters went to and fro. An apology was demanded. This I resolutely refused to give. If it cost me a thousand pounds I'd pay rather than apologize for something of this type, and I said so. The solicitor tried arguing. I think he found that he had met his match there, for if ever there was a woman who won't, that is myself.

Whilst all this was going on, the worst happened to me. Really quite the worst. I went on a Whitsun cruise to the North of Spain. I thought it would be a pleasant break for myself and son, then in the late teens.

It ought to have been the loveliest cruise ever, and it would have been save that the weather took against us, and never in a vast experience of the sea have I known such a time (we lost a couple of anchors in Corunna Bay, so you can imagine what it was like). They had a marvellous programme, and we got on board nice and early and watched others coming aboard. First of all a woman I did not care too much about, have known for years, and can never lose; and then, just as we were about to sail, would you believe it, the very man who was suing me for libel.

This is too much! I gasped.

I went down to the dining saloon steward to make sure that we were not sitting at the same table, which was more than one could be expected to bear, and

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although we were not actually doing that, I thought it discreet to move my whereabouts to the other side of the saloon.

I was almost bound to draw him as partner in the Paul Jones, or the treasure hunt or something, I felt, and then what were the niceties of etiquette?

There was no Paul Jones, or treasure hunt. I never got as far as that. The seas broke over us, and everybody was sick, and how sick! The third day, feeling green as a lettuce on deck, I lay there limply, and to my fury saw the man stalking along rosy and gay, and obviously the world's best sailor!

There is no justice in this world.

I ask you!

CHAPTER TWELVE

No Lady turns to other themes,
And greater dreams.

OF all the trips I have ever taken, and jobs on which I have been sent out, I think the nudist camp was the prize one. I arranged to do it for a certain paper, a pass was sent to me, and I fitted it in on a motor tour. On the first day out from London, I arranged to call at the camp.

This was convenient, they said.

I stipulated that I should not have to go round it nude. They appeared to think that I should feel a good deal more comfortable nude than dressed. I begged to differ on this point, and won my day. Nothing would have induced me, fond as I am of sun-bathing, to go about a nudist camp in the "rig-of-the-day," as the Naval wives would have called it.

I started on this tour in a large car. In Southsea there was a funeral garage from which I used to hire. They could provide you with a car the size of a hearse, which would take the complete picnic lunches for the fortnight's motor tour, and was most convenient. We always had the same driver, our Jim, whom we all liked so much, and we hope that our Jim liked us. You could rely on our Jim never letting the side down.

However, on this occasion our Jim thought he was in for a real old party. He, Robbie, and my son Pip, had all got the impression that they were going to be allowed inside the nudist camp and were going to have the lark of their lives. In vain did I say *en route*, "You know the pass is only for me, you won't be able to get in."

Our Jim had an idea. I could say that I was not well and could not cover the distance entailed (the brochure said that many acres were dedicated to this praiseworthy object), then he could drive me through in the car. But it wasn't as easy as that!

"I'm not going to have him driving you through, whilst Pip and I have to stand gaping outside, with our tongues hanging out," said my husband.

"I'm not going to have any of you in on this," said I. "If you come in, you'll only make me laugh, and after all it *is* my job, and I'm not paid to go there and think it all very funny."

"We'll manage somehow," said they.

When we arrived (and we had a frightful job finding the place, which was magnificently concealed), it was surrounded by a high palisade, much higher than anyone could hope to look over, though it had a small space at the bottom, under which you could see approaching feet. No feet were approaching.

"Now do tell them that we're here, and interested, and that you can't leave us outside like this," said Robbie.

"And," said our Jim, getting nervous that he might be squeezed out of the party, "that I'm here too."

"I don't see how I *can*," I said, willing, but unable to oblige.

The door was opened by a large man fully dressed, which I found a blessed relief. I showed my pass. He wafted me in, frowning on the other three and the car. My last glimpse was of three dropping faces, who right up to the final moment had really believed that I'd work something for them and manage to get them inside. I really wouldn't have believed that they could have been so keen!

The place was full of bushes and scrub, it looked much like any other place. "The secretary's office is along here," said the man, and he led the way.

It was a small hut, from which the clacking of typewriters came with a pleasant familiarity. He opened the door, I took in a deep breath and went inside. But it was just an ordinary hut, with two girls sitting typing at separate desks. There was nothing peculiar, or strange, or in any way different about it, in fact I quite liked the place.

"Miss Bloom?" said one of them, and when I said that I was, she said, "If you'd sit down a moment, I'll send for the secretary and he'll take you round."

"Thank you," said I.

I read their little pamphlet whilst sitting. The nudist camp had private huts, where private air and sun baths could be enjoyed, etc., and also public swim pools, and tennis and badminton courts. You could not get in without a medical certificate saying that you needed sun and air, and it was all very well run.

The door opened. I looked up. It was the secretary . . . and he hadn't a stitch on him. For one moment I was completely shattered. I quavered to my feet, wondered if this was really me, if I had suddenly fainted, or was having gas for the removal of a tooth, or what had happened. But here was a nice little man wearing a black beard, and exactly nothing else.

He was unabashed; he might have been walking about all his life like that for all he appeared to care. And I've got to admit that, after the first seven minutes, it really did not seem a bit peculiar, and the wild longing to make sure that he really *had* got nothing on, seemed to have abated. He said we'd go off round the grounds, and out he walked leading the way. Then of course I realized that I had been accurate in my first surmise; he hadn't got bathing trunks on, he hadn't got anything but that funny little black beard.

He led the way out into the bush and scrub, and the oddest thing seemed to be that he had no shoes on his feet either. It quite worried me that he would hurt his

feet. We hadn't gone ten yards before we ran into a couple of completely ordinary dustmen emptying the dustbins. What they thought of me and my extraordinary friend, I don't know. I did feel over-dressed. I felt absurd. The pale pink silk summer frock that I wore became superfluous, the hat too big, the white shoes too much of a good thing. I refused to look at the dustmen. What they thought, was their own kettle of fish.

Off we trotted, and for a little while it was just bush and scrub, then we came to a clearing. It was the tennis courts. Two young men and a couple of girls were leaping about, with tennis rackets.

This, of course, is the zoo, I told myself. I shall wake up in a moment and realize something has happened to me and it is all just a dream. It's the zoo, only even that has gone wrong.

The next thing I thought was that they really weren't very pretty. Because the average man and woman when undressed is not a bit like an artist's model; they wobbled; they bulged at the tummy and elsewhere. They were more nauseating than anything else.

We went on to the swimming pool, and, seen amongst green leafy foliage, I must admit that the people did look natural. Then I wondered what they did about handkerchiefs and small change? Where would they keep that sort of thing? I daren't ask.

My friend now led me to the restaurant, where children looking quite sweet were playing on a verandah. Inside a woman was cooking sausages. She wore nothing at all, save a pair of *pince-nez* and a string of red beads, and the fat was spitting at her, so that she had to keep on bobbing back all the time. I just couldn't believe it.

She talked to me unabashed, poking the sausages and leaping back from them, then poking them again. And how they spat! The red bead necklace looked overmuch, the *pince-nez* seemed to be *de trop*.

I could not resist asking, "Why did you choose to cook sausages?"

She said that she chose them because people liked sausages. I suggested that she should bake them, it would be less painful; she said that people preferred them to be fried. Yes, but—I said, and then the words stuck. I couldn't say "Why in the world do you fry sausages when you're naked and they're spitting at you all the time?"

Apparently the nudes came and ate in the restaurant still nude, or took their food out into the gardens to eat; there was extraordinary happy-go-luckiness about the place.

Then we walked back through the bushes, and in on some of the little private huts where couples were sitting reading in the sun. Really it *was* the most amazing place!

As we neared the entrance gates, I remembered the car outside, and the three perspiring gents sitting in it, with their tongues hanging out, and wondered if I could possibly suggest that they might be allowed in. Then I felt that I couldn't. After all, their one idea was vulgar curiosity, and these people had to be protected against that sort of thing.

We approached the gate. I became aware that the three the other side could see us coming, because our feet were visible under the heavy palisade, and there were my white shoes strapped with brown, which they probably recognized, and a pair of totally bare feet accompanying them, which would give them the jitters of excitement.

The man who kept the doors, and was fully clothed, appeared to think just nothing of all this; he bestirred himself, yawned, and came to open the gate. I thought "If only they rush it now, they'll be inside, and nothing in this world will stop them!" But they didn't rush it.

I said goodbye to a totally nude man, and by this

time the curious part (which I have never been able to understand) was that I had become accustomed to his nudity and was not even worried by it. In fact, as I was let out into the sunlight beyond, it was almost surprising to find Robbie and Pip and our Jim fully dressed.

"Well?" said they, and then Robbie, in a most indignant voice, "I think that was one of the meanest things that you have ever done!"

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I went out to Oberammergau for my paper, to write about the Passion Play. I was interested in this work, and thought that I should probably have a most exciting trip, which turned out to be a good deal too exciting, because I went on into Austria—it was the time that poor little Dolfuss was shot—and I had "journalist" on my passport, which made things difficult for me.

The journalist abroad is not popular. They thought that I must be a political journalist, gone out there to pick up the crumbs, instead of a harmless woman with her son going out to see the play, and making a wide détour home.

Oberammergau is a small village in the mountains, or rather at the foot of the mountains, and I admit that I went there to be unimpressed. I know these tourist places of old, and do not think too much of ones that make trade out of religion. I have never been to Lourdes, but can imagine it (perhaps entirely wrongly); I certainly had got the wrong idea of Oberammergau.

You paid for the entire week-end in England, and you could choose between a house, a first-class house, or a luxury house. I chose the luxury house, which was two pounds ten a nob, and that included a ticket to the play on the Sunday, so nobody could say it was wildly expensive.

With memories of my youth at Stratford-on-Avon, where they will easily charge you half-a-crown for a

dirty little sprig of rosemary, because dear William mentioned it in Hamlet, and where you cannot get a bun without it having had something to do with William and Anne Hathaway (and it tastes like it, too), I had rather queer ideas about what Oberammergau could do for me.

Arriving there, I found a largish village, beautifully situated with a mountain torrent gushing down into it, and every flower-box brimming over with fuchsias and petunias in brilliant colours. No man has his hair cut, and all wear beards. I don't mean that they wear the sort of beard you and I are used to, but they have a childish, fluffy sort of beard, which means that their chins have never met razors.

They meet you at the station with little boxes they pull after them on strings, on to which they load your luggage. They have got it all off pat, and off you go to your luxury house, where you can be sure of a right royal welcome.

You think that it is the ordinary little village of commerce, perhaps very much of commerce, which is exactly where you are wrong, because it isn't, and very soon it dawns on you that something queer is afoot. To act in the play they exact a certain standard. You *must* be a christian, and being a christian isn't being what you and I think it is; it means going a good deal further than that. For instance, when the first vendor of fancy braces (coveted by my son) informed me that they were extremely dear, and that in the next village I could get them for at least half the price, I was worried. I said that surely his master would be horrified, and what on earth did he mean by telling me that sort of thing? He said gravely that it was impossible for him to tell me a lie, just as it would be impossible for me to lie to him.

There he flattered himself! It would be quite easy for me to lie to him. My life is built up of nice little social lies, as everybody else's life is; I was staggered that

evening when I wandered through the shops and met no social lies.

"How much it that?"

"It is a hundred marks."

"Oh heavens! It's a bit expensive."

"Yes, it is. It's very dear."

No further comment, just that it was "very dear," and that was that! Only it *is* unnerving. Before very long we were doing it ourselves. I said to Pip "Where is my eau-de-Cologne?" Quite calmly he said "When we ran into the buffers at Brussels it fell out of the window. It was my fault, I'd put it by the open window."

Usually he would have explained that it was anybody's fault but his own, preferably mine! Before long, we were both getting it really badly.

On the morning of the play everything concentrates on it. At eight, a gun booms up the valley. Long before this the first sign of the play is to be seen, which is a gaily-caparisoned little donkey trotting up the street. The play starts with the Entry into Jerusalem, in which the donkey plays a major part. As they are so fussy about their own private lives before they can take a part in their play, I tried to make a few enquiries into the private life of the donkey, but found this did not go down at all well. I could foresee a very good article on *Animals of the Passion Play*, for one or two come into it, but decided against it.

Personally I thought that the play was long-winded. It is not what the average Englishman expects. It starts at eight, goes on until midday, when you all adjourn to your houses, first-class houses, or luxury houses, for lunch, and then return to the last rather grim scenes.

I imagine that some years ago it was wonderful when it was acted by simple peasants, who really did live it, and when the Entry into Jerusalem approached the natural theatre through a two-mile pass between the

mountains, and you could see and hear them coming. Today the audience is under cover, and there is a stage, beautifully built and very reverent, which is open to the sun and rain (it rained cats and dogs that day), but there are no lighting effects, and no make-up is allowed. The play is falling between two stools; it has lost the rugged simplicity which must have been its beauty of old, and yet has not reached that state when it is exquisitely produced.

They make it tedious by putting in long tableaux of the Old Testament. Just as you think you are getting on with the play, you are dragged back by one of the tableaux. In this way I imagine every man, woman and child is enabled to get into it somehow or another.

Of course the real bad hats give up the ghost, and get their hair cut, which is the last sign of criminal tendencies in Oberammergau. No married woman acts in the play.

It seemed to go on and on, swinging in between these tiresome tableaux, and then getting on with the play a little, and then a spot more of the chorus (this year the Christus was played by Anton Lang), then back to the tableaux once more. I got weary. It seemed that like this the thing would go on all day. The King of Siam was in the Royal box, and it struck me that he seemed to be getting very weary too.

We all adjourned to the most glorious lunch in a very *Autumn Crocus* setting. Three American Bishops, a doctor, a friend and her daughter, two spinster ladies, a couple of German *frauen* from Wiesbaden, an Italian Bishop and several others. They fed us marvellously, and would wait on us themselves, because apparently they thought that was the right thing to do. They were horribly humble, and just made you feel personally revolting.

Then back we went.

Pilate was a wonderful actor, but I was never moved

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by the Christus, and knew that I ought to have been, for all round me old ladies wept, save an American woman who chewed gum all through it, and kept on saying "Shucks!" I felt that in every big moment the play missed its mark. On the cross, pandering to German morals, the Christus wore a white woollen vest. The vest entirely disillusioned one.

Nothing would take my attention from that vest, and oh, I was so angry with myself! A bird came and perched on an arm of the cross, which did give me a curious feeling of reality, but there was always that dreadful woollen vest.

The visions presented difficulties. No fripperies were allowed, Reinhardt could not skylark with effects, so that when an angel appeared, a Teuton maiden stumped on to the stage, holding an enormous gold egg cup, which I found later was supposed to be a chalice.

I think the last straw was afterwards when, a bit bewildered from it all, we went out into the lovely surroundings to talk it over, and saw John the Baptist ride away on a bicycle!

I got my copy posted off to the paper, and went on to Innsbruck, but Innsbruck was in a ferment. In the middle of the night there were explosions, and I woke up and thought it must be an air raid. What was going on I have never discovered, but the hotel gave me some garbled version of it being the wicked people who would destroy Austria, and inquired if I had come to write about it. This I didn't like; I had come to wander in the fields, drink in the cafés, and get some smattering of an idea of what life here was like.

So I left.

At the station a man who looked startlingly official stopped me and insisted on going through my luggage, saying that he was looking for bombs. I was completely petrified. It was a musical comedy station, with baskets

of ferns and geraniums hanging all down it, and there was I standing helplessly with my son, whilst an official looked in my oh-no-we-never-mention-'ems for bombs! I ask you!

However, waiting on the platform was an extremely nice young monk, of (I imagine) rather a lax order, because usually "eyes have they but they see not"; he *did* see, and came up speaking excellent English and asking if he could help at all. I told him what was happening. He said that they had all gone mad and were really very frightened. He thought there might be a war if things went on this way, and could not imagine whither the world was drifting. I told him that I thought it was a bit far-fetched to think of a war, but I was scared stiff that they *would* find bombs in my what-nots.

"You don't mean that you have *got* bombs?" he asked.

"No, of course not. I'm travelling on holiday with my son. I came out to see the Passion Play and thought that I'd like a peep at this part of the world. We came on here from Garmisch."

He seemed to be enormously relieved.

When I got into the train without my bombs, I was very much relieved, and off we went to Munich. But all the time I kept turning over what the young monk had said, and when I got to Munich I was even more suspicious.

They had some military manoeuvres on, something that I could not follow at all, but as we approached the city there were literally five miles of tanks nose to tail.

All the Germans appeared to be apathetic towards this. They purred a bit to themselves, but nothing more. I thought that it was very extraordinary to see such a display. In the hotel where we stayed I thought I would do a bit of "pumping". The head porter had been head porter at the Green Park Hotel in England for a

long time; I asked him what was happening with all these military parades. He said that Germany had never lost the last war. I asked him if he thought that another war was coming, and he insisted that nothing could be further from their desires; they very much desired peace, Adolf Hitler (with a salute) most of all. Peace was important, but the Germans could not allow themselves to be trampled upon for ever.

I said that I could not see that they had been trampled upon, they appeared to be prosperous. He said that was all thanks to Adolf Hitler, with more salutes. But soon the time would come when the world would have to accept the German Reich for itself. They could not continue on the aftermath of an unfair peace; after all, they had *not* lost the last war.

I thought this was dreadful. I decided that I would enquire a little further, and I tackled a woman who had a small son of about nine with her; she appeared to be the sensible sort, and anyway women think more intimately than men when it comes to war, because they have a natural antipathy to their husbands and sons marching off and getting killed.

She was quite "pumpable" (best parson's daughter style, here). She said that her little Heinrich was doing very well in the Youth Movement, which, from what she told me, seemed to be all pack drill and no pay.

She was a Catholic, and I asked her how she reconciled herself to the religious difficulties, which she had at first admitted, I thought, with some uneasiness. She said that she was convinced that Adolf Hitler knew best. Look what he had done for Germany! Look at the roads! It was peculiar but whenever you argued with them, back they came to the roads. She said, working herself up, that they had been the victims of a most cruel peace, at a time when they were badly let down by their leaders and unable to help themselves. The

war had never been lost; they could, and would, have gone on fighting, if only their leaders had not let them down.

Just as I imagine this time they will argue that they could and would have won the war if only we had not "started" that dreadful civilian bombing! I can see that one coming.

I asked her about her home life, it seemed to be merely routine of Nazi derivation. She dared not look ahead. I realized that fairly early on. Training, faith and conscience told her that she was wrong, but she could not get herself out of it. She had become hopelessly entangled in a web, and the strands of the web were electrified. That about summed up the situation in Germany just then.

I went on to Wiesbaden, and talked with another hotel porter who had been in England from 1913 to 1930, and wanted to go back. He said that war was coming. He was convinced that this time Germany was going to be razed to the dust, and that people would rise and curse the day that they had ever thought of another war.

I said that I didn't think he was right at all; I couldn't believe that a sane Europe would plunge itself into a war that would be so deadly. He was depressed.

Coming up the Rhine on a steamer, one of those gay little steamers with flags that flutter and which play *Die Lorelei* as you get within sight of the rock, I chatted to another German mother. She was brimming over with pride in the new Germany which had risen phoenix-like from its ashes. She wanted war. She believed that only by the blood of her sons could Germany rise victorious, and crush those hateful enemies who had tried to strangle her. By her flashing eyes, I gathered that she included me in this category.

I felt uncomfortable.

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Although Germany was amusing, and I liked the life there, the beer gardens, the cafés, and the flower-boxes brimming over with their full glory of scarlet and purple flowers, I had the feeling that the most sinister undercurrent ran through it.

What was the answer?

At that time, I had no idea.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

And so she comes into her own,
No Lady meets a microphone.

I MET Val Gielgud at a cocktail party given by Julia Cairns, one winter's evening. I had heard a good deal about him, I got to know him, and one day I said to him, "You know, I'd love to try my hand at a play for broadcasting. That's one of the things I'd like to do."

He looked at me dubiously. "I somehow can't see you doing it," he said.

Now that, of course, is a match to tinder with No Lady. She only needs somebody to say to her that she can't, and she damn well will! She doesn't mind if she waits a complete lifetime to get her own back, and attain her ends; she'll get them all right, because she is that sort of a woman.

I asked Mabel Constanduros about it. Was it very difficult? Mabel was extremely helpful; she talked to me and showed me some of the outstanding points that, left to myself, I doubt if I should have learnt for years. I mentioned ideas for plots, and she put her finger on a couple of possibles. She suggested a synopsis first, the other meant such a lot of work, and even then might miss the boat, so I offered a synopsis. Noah's dove returned.

I thought, "If he thinks he has put me off that way, he makes a mistake." The third synopsis was referred to as a chance, I took it home and I worked it up like mad. I know now how bad it was, because I had made the frightful mistake of trying to write for sound, when really one ought to ignore that, write one's play, and then let sound take it over. It went through.

Unfortunately it was a play about a journey coming home from Austria at the outbreak of the war; how two people, in their horror at the new crisis, really found themselves. It was billed to be broadcast after the news one June night, a very critical June night, in 1940.

I was staying at Buckingham. I had my wireless with me, and all day walked about on pins. It's an exciting moment when your first play is to be broadcast. To and fro I walked, and the nearer we came to the news, the more petrified I was. Never had Stuart Hibberd seemed longer, and incidentally it was certain that never had the news seemed viler!

Then came silence. Husband and I, sitting side by side on the hotel bed, held hands, and I wondered if I was going to be sick. An orchestra started in the distance playing a little serious music.

"Obviously not quite ready," said Robbie, to convince me and set me at my ease.

The orchestra went on playing; it seemed to have settled in to a good long piece; my eye travelled to the clock, and wondered what would happen if they overlapped. Could we be on the wrong station? But no, of course we weren't on the wrong station. The orchestra finished.

"Now!" we said.

Some unknown and entirely unwanted voice stated that the orchestra would now play something that nobody (especially ourselves) wished to hear!

We stared at one another. Had some awful mistake been made? What could have happened? There it was in the *Radio Times*. *Homecoming*, by Ursula Bloom. And now there was some wretched orchestra drivelling away with a sonata.

We gave it up half an hour later, and went out into the lanes to swear.

What had happened was that somebody had got cold feet that the play held some political reference,

and the news had suddenly tensed up. Val was not there to put matters right, nobody could tell the powers-that-be that everything was "okay" really.

It was re-billed later that summer, and I heard it in my hotel bedroom in London, and was too much ashamed afterwards to go down into the lounge in case anybody else had heard it. It was over-produced. All the most fearful effects got into it, it was the noisiest play I have ever heard, and I cried with misery.

But they did make it up to me on my next play *Triangle*, produced by Howard Rose, and most beautifully he did it. It was so good that I never for a moment recognized it; wouldn't have believed that I had written it.

The plays went on.

They had become part of my daily work, and I loved them, because I had made up my mind that it is useless in any career to sit tight; new ground must be broken, I had got to forge ahead, and I had got to become a playwright.

I've got to get a big play on, I told myself, I'll start at the beginning, but I'll get there. I'm not too old—yet.

On to the air went *Silver Fox*, *Wise Thrush*, *The Boot Cleaner*, *Train to York*, one after the other. It was interesting work writing them. I always got depressed over the ones that failed, because I had many ideas that I was itching to put over, but couldn't, ideas that I still think would succeed, but the B.B.C. didn't.

Incidentally, I started on the air myself.

It all began a long long while ago, to do with advertising for Radio Normandy. Radio Normandy was the greatest fun. I have never been very good at settling prices about advertising goods, one charges very much more for this sort of thing, so much that sometimes one is staggered, and rather ashamed. Leastways I was.

Once Robbie and I went to see a man who wanted something written to advertise jellies, or shoes, or hats, I forget which. *En route* we discussed what I ought to ask. Twenty-five guineas I thought—it was merely a very few minutes' work. He thought that was a bit too much; no use killing the golden goose, said Robbie.

When we got there the man was charming. During the course of conversation I applied a little journalism to him, and came to the conclusion that he could pay a good deal more if pushed, and in fact he expected to be pushed.

"Now about this difficult matter of price," said he.

I demurred, said I'd rather he gave a price, he said that he would rather I did. In the end I said "Well, I'm afraid I'm a bit expensive. What about sixty guineas?"

For one horrifying moment Robbie's face completely changed, then he recovered himself.

"Done!" said the man, and I could have kicked myself, because I knew he had expected me to ask a hundred. Really, it is the *most* difficult world!

"How you've got the nerve!" said Robbie when we got back into the car. "Really, when you said sixty you could have knocked me down with a feather!"

I went to record for Radio Normandy, it was all so simple that you wouldn't have believed it. Never for a moment was I nervous.

That's queer, isn't it? Speaking in public always gives me the jitters, but the mike is a friend! I think that I had never supposed that recording could be so easy, and although at first sight the studio looked alarming, everybody was so pleasant and kind that one was soon at ease.

Then I went to the B.B.C. The first time it was the old swift thrill of entering Heaven via Portland Place, and

oh, how much more difficult than any of the locked doors of the writing world!

On arrival I was confronted by the most formidable policeman. Give me dear Mr. Glover of the *Daily Mail*, any day. I was directed to a corner, where my business was enquired into by a gent. with a piercing eye, and woe betide you if you had no business. My identity had to be proved, and every detail gone into before there was a hope of being wafted into one of the impressive lifts, and as I went up, I had an insane belief that I'd hear a voice saying "Ladies' underwear, mantles, children's gowns and haircutting, fourth floor." You don't get that same feeling in literary offices, but here at the B.B.C. it was all very "Ladies' underwear, mantles, children's gowns and haircutting." The lift took me upwards to God. At least I imagined it could only be to God!

One of my early efforts was *At the Sign of the Black Dog*, which was a most matey programme with no script; you just sat round a table chatting, and Howard Marshall made it all so awfully easy that you couldn't believe what was happening to you. On arrival I went up and was interviewed in a tiny room, a thoroughly friendly interview, with Howard Marshall and Sunday Willshin. Then we went into the actual broadcasting studio, not so large as most, and with a much more friendly air, so that it got the best from you every time. The rehearsal was the simplest thing, nobody could have disliked it; then out we went to the little club across Portland Place (now bombed to extinction, and while I was trying to become a member, in fact I believe my application was the one which got stuck on the ceiling in the bombing), we had drinks and chatted.

It is such a pity that I don't drink; I hate this more and more every day. If only I could have something mild to steady the old nerves, it would be a boon and a blessing. Instead I ask for a grapefruit, or something

equally silly, and everybody's chin immediately drops, thinking that I am a sworn teetotaller, casting the evil eye on every glass that they raise to their lips, which is quite wrong, I don't like it, I get drunk, I am objectionable. Those are my three reasons.

Surely a woman could not put up better ones?

Back we went to the studio, up to God again, and when we sat round the table I just didn't know when the red light went on. We were just talking. It isn't a bit like speechifying, which is plain *awful*, it is the most delightful feeling. I didn't even remember that the maids at home had my radio in my bedroom tuned in (it was "the day for the bedroom") and would be listening to me, probably with criticism.

The conversation flowed pleasantly. I was actually sorry when it was over.

In Town To-Night was another effort, with Lionel Gamlin. There was a rehearsal at three p.m., which entirely spoilt a nice Saturday afternoon, and was regarded with considerable disfavour by my husband, who had to take me up to Broadcasting House in the car. Then we had to get an early meal, and dash into Broadcasting House bright and early at seven, for they like to be sure of you, and in that, goodness knows I don't blame them!

Upstairs in the studio the bunch of us were assembled; we had not met before. Some were sorry, some were gay, some dour, others over-chatty. There was a very charming young Frenchman who was not in the least scared, and a blustering man, who would precede me on the air, and kept telling everybody that he didn't give a damn; in the end he had to be shepherded over his script, and myself wafted in early to cover his demise.

We all sat on a long form, and there were two tables set with mikes, one with Lionel Gamlin at it, and the other with a woman broadcaster; as our time came we

tip-toed to our appointed place, and then took our turn.

At the stroke of eight, up went the red light, and out of the distance came the sound of the tune which personally I like so much. It was inspiring. It was in the next room, so it sounded very far away, and as the music died down, the announcer began his rôle.

"Some of the interesting people who are in Town to-night . . ."

And I was one of them. Interesting! Me!

One after another they went forward to read their pieces. There was one most difficult moment, when an agonized woman got her script stuck, the pages just *wouldn't* turn over for her, and she looked as if the end of the world was coming. For her—poor thing—it was!

The Frenchman was marvellous, so gay and good-natured, but of course the man who had said he didn't give a damn gave several damns, fluffed it, and suddenly I found myself where I hadn't expected to be, leastways so soon.

It was too easy. Lionel Gamlin always addresses the people he interviews by their christian name, and I had made a bet with a friend who was listening in from a pub, that he wouldn't; she said he would. Well, either he didn't like me, or I looked fierce, but the first thing I did when I got out was to send a postcard to my friend:

And he never called me Ursula.

I almost hated hearing the music again at the end, to wind things up, and I went out, to be paid on the spot (no hanging about with broadcasting like the publishing houses), and to sign the tea-cloth which in those days everyone who broadcast in *In Town To-Night* used to sign.

I read my own short stories, which was interesting work, in the big Maida Vale studio, in *Ack-Ack-Beer-Beer*.

Then I did the *Women at War* programme, wrote it and compèred with James Urquhart. Bill McLurg, then in charge of this, very much wanted me to do the General Post Office programme, but that I simply could not do.

A year or so back my work had taken me over there, and I never spent a more ghastly time. When I came out I was so tired that I sat down in a taxicab and cried. Even for my work, to which I admit eternal devotion, I could not face the General Post Office again, with hours of unpleasantness at so-called Mount Pleasant. I was sent there to write an article on the kindly handling of parcels by the thoughtful G.P.O., and came away wondering how any parcel ever got to any destination intact! Some go up, some go down, but all seem to go wallop! The most interesting section was the parcels repairs department, and the department where they peep inside newspapers to see if a letter is hidden within with the idea of getting it through at printed paper rate. They have quite an uncanny knowledge of the suspicious in this way.

"But no," I said to Bill McLurg, "you can do the Post Office. I'll do the W.V.S. one next week. I couldn't face Mount Pleasant again."

So I got the W.V.S.

I wrote up the script, having innumerable brochures and pamphlets to help me. It was difficult to introduce music, which I wanted to introduce, and ultimately did. Bill McLurg liked it, and the day dawned.

At ten o'clock I had to go for the preliminary rehearsal to somewhere in the Marylebone Road. Although they had given me the most detailed directions to enable me to find it, when Robbie and I got there in the car it was extremely difficult. I had not suspected that it would be camouflaged as a private house, as indeed it was, and an extremely attractive private house too.

On the first floor a crowd was sitting round in a large room, and I took my place feeling most sheepish. It was the first time I had done this, and although my plan of campaign was to "sit still and say nuffink", like Brer Rabbit, it didn't seem to be a plan that they were going to let me follow.

It was read through, and never had my lines sounded more daft, in particular the ones that I had to say myself. I kept asking myself why I had ever done this. Last week when I had watched rehearsals for something else, I had been highly amused at how it sounded. There had been one line about the "petals of the withering pear blossom" that had always been cropping up. Whenever I went into the studio they had been on about the pear blossom, and I had thought it rather funny.

Now it wasn't so funny when my script was in the pear blossom's place.

However, we adjourned for coffee at eleven, and went back at it until one, and that was that. It seemed to be shaping.

After lunch we met at an Oxford Street studio, the programme would be broadcast at five, and Robbie and the car stood by at the top of Hyde Park to take me on to Broadcasting House or Maida Vale, where I imagined it was being broadcast. Half-way through the afternoon, Bill McLurg told me that it would be broadcast from where we were, and I had to plead time to nip out and tell Robbie.

I had an idea that Bill thought my plans were for something entirely different, but he said "Please don't be too long," and I, the most punctual woman alive, said "No, no, of course not," and nipped.

There was the car at anchor. No Robbie! Heavens, I thought, he wants to hear the programme so much, and doesn't know that it is being broadcast from the studio; I shall never dare ask to come back and tell him. What

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shall I do? In the dim distance, behind all the speechifying crowds under the flags, I saw Robbie innocently playing with the dog. I waved. But he is a nice man, his mother warned him of the doings of strange women, and he did not recognize me! I pinned a note to the car, telling him where I was and he must dash home if he was to hear the broadcast, and then come back to take me away to supper somewhere later. At the last moment he caught sight of me.

I had to run all the way back to the studio; I was late already, and felt most ashamed.

However, Robbie did hear the broadcast and liked it, so all was well.

Back in the studio everybody was settling down to it in earnest, and how they worked! Through and through the thing we went, the "withering pear blossom" of last week wasn't in it; finally, when we were going through it for what I believed to be the last time of all, to my horror I found that the red light was up, and we had been on the air for four complete minutes. Well, thought I, I'm not doing too badly, after all.

James Urquhart had taken me to the canteen for a cup of tea before we actually started, and life brightened. I was so thankful that it was the last time through that I don't think I cared. I fluffed one cue, but the orchestra came to my rescue, and Robbie, who was listening in at home, said that he never noticed it.

But then probably Robbie is well trained. I wouldn't know.

He rescued me later. I came out of the studio in the Monseigneur theatre into Oxford Street, very crowded on a hot summer's evening, and I walked away towards Hyde Park, with the people still holding court from the soap boxes, and the crowds surging round, and suddenly felt a bit crumpled.

I was thankful to see Robbie. He said, "I've fixed up a table at the Ivy, you must be famished."

I was.

The Ivy is always delightful, it is home. I came there from sevenpennyworth at Lyons', and a two-and-sixpenny lunch at the Strand Palace. I've stayed at the Ivy. I hope that I always shall.

Here everybody meets everybody, it is more of a club than a restaurant, and the food is more than reliable; if you simply can't choose for yourself because you are too tired, somebody comes forward and does it all for you. It is fun on a summer's night sitting there when the theatre is over, and you can enjoy a quiet meal; it was lovely after that really frightful day was over (spoilt of course by a woman in W.V.S. uniform coming in at the door, at a time when really—God forgive me—I had had my fill of them), but it was pleasant to sit back quietly there.

Now television was a vastly different proposition.

When I said that I would televise, I had no idea what I was in for, in fact I had never even seen a television set and was the complete greenhorn about it. But I had agreed to be at the Alexandra Palace one evening punctually at seven, and off we went. When we got to Wood Green we were lost. The awful part was that for a long time we did not know that we were lost, and went on losing precious minutes, which was quite horrifying. It all happened because of a disastrous short cut "old so-and-so" at the office had told to Robbie, one of those short cuts you can't possibly miss, which makes it all the more infuriating.

I got very frightened; we had allowed a big margin of time for getting lost, but we were rather a long time in being found again, so that I was on tenterhooks.

Eventually we saw Alexandra Palace standing there, and darned glad we were. But it is one of those places which, when you think you are there, you aren't! It is a positive maze. Round and round we went, unable to

find anywhere to park the car, or anybody about, and time was running out on us. Be it said greatly to our credit (had they only known it), we appeared inside at 6.56 to the tick.

It seemed to me to be rather a queer thing to televise before I had even seen a television set, but I had to go through with it. Rehearsal first; I was to chat for a minute or two on beginning in the writing world, and repeat the awful poem about a snowdrop which I had written. It isn't quite as easy as it sounds. The one thing you must not do, is look at the camera, and to talk into thin air somewhere at the side is a bit unnerving just at first. The moment that somebody tells you that you must not look at a certain object, of course you do. Your eye gets attracted, and wanders round and round, nothing will deter it; leastways nothing deterred mine.

The rehearsal over, I was sent off to the make-up room, where a stranger took possession of my face and completely transformed it. This took a long time, and I began to wonder what Robbie might be doing. I suspected that he must be hanging about somewhere, thoroughly bored. When we had at last parked the car, his tongue had been hanging out for that touch of Plymouth which makes the whole world gin. Did they keep such tipples in Alexandra Palace, and if so, had Robbie been able to tap it?

Coming out into the passage, I was completely rushed by a large chorus of girls dressed as semi-sailors (the landlubbers call them "Middies"), they were apparently attached to a musical comedy which was being televised in an adjacent room.

It was all very back-stage.

I was then parked in a largish studio where a foreign violinist was "on the air", followed by Laura Henderson, who was really a wonderful woman, and started the Windmill Theatre, "art for art's sake". She was so

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completely at her ease that I got courage from her, and when I took her place before the camera and mike, I was astounded that the whole thing was so simple. I told my little stories, and laughed at that ridiculous poem about the snowdrop—wish I could remember the thing nowadays—and it was all too easy.

I was even more surprised later, when they put me into a small private theatre and let me see television for the first time. The musical comedy was afoot, and all the so-called "Middies" flopping about in fine fettle. I thought that the screen seemed to be extremely small, I don't know why, but I had expected it to be bigger.

On the way back we called in on Cecil Hunt and his wife in Highgate—he had televised only the preceding week.

"It's simple, isn't it?" he asked.

It had been very simple indeed.

On several occasions I took part in Quizzes.

I adore this sort of thing, nothing could make me happier than any little game of this kind, and I was thrilled the first time to find that Christina Foyle had thought of me and that, in company with Lady Cynthia Asquith, Pamela Frankau, Louis Golding, Peter Cheyney, and I forget whom else, I was to compete on the air with the publishers.

A cocktail party was in progress when I arrived in Portland Place, and a very matey cocktail party it was, with everybody talking very hard, and apparently quite unnerved, though usually you find afterwards that they admit to that sinking feeling not connected with Bovril. Michael Joseph was there. Now Michael is a positive fund of knowledge; I defy anybody to floor him with a quiz.

"I wish I could have you with me to tell me all the answers," I said.

"Oh, you'll be all right," said Michael.

I doubted it.

Everyone did very well with the cocktails, where of course I am at such a dreadful disadvantage, then we were all borne upstairs. At the studio doors we were separated from our accompanying friends, who now it seemed to me filled the rôle of mourners, and whilst we went inside they went into a far room, separated from us by a glass wall, through which we could see them still drinking whiskies and soda.

"Talk about a cad's trick!" said Michael, somewhat bitterly, when we first spotted them.

To our horror another quiz was in progress; it was terrifying. It was a quiz between Lancashire lads and London lads, and they were asking twelve-year-olds questions that not one of us could have answered. This was an eye-opener! It is not a very pleasant feeling knowing that you have to show your complete ignorance to the entire world.

One small cockney lad was asked who was the Lord Privy Seal (we stared helplessly at one another like dead cods already on the slab), but that little boy had got it! Of course if this was the sort of thing they intended doing to us, we were for it hook, line and sinker, and with a wallop.

"I don't know the answers to any political questions," said Peter Cheyney, "they know that."

"It's music gets me," whispered Pamela Frankau. The Frankaus are notoriously unmusical, to such a degree that music positively upsets them. Gilbert goes mad if a barrel organ arrives when he is writing, and somebody has to rush out and shoo it off. They can't stand it. I sympathize, and can easily imagine how they feel.

It seemed to me that in this quiz any of my readers who listened in were going to get a very poor idea of their pet author's educational facilities, and I went very *piano*.

"I'm sunk before it starts," I said to Michael.

"Oh rubbish!" said he.

The others stood down; we had reached the phase when I don't think we cared if they stayed to listen to our ignominy. The mike was placed on a table. We sat on a form on either side, authors grouped on one bench, publishers opposite. Michael *would* pull faces at me!

The question-master presiding over the mike explained what we did. We filed in a procession towards him, rose on hassock and replied (or failed to reply) to question (with all the goofers still enjoying themselves behind the glass wall), then we took up our place at the end of the procession to start again. I was about fourth along.

I waited in horror for the first poser, because it would give me a good idea of what was coming. I could have answered it, but the publisher who got it fluffed it, and was gonged. Peter Cheyney, next, went down wallop. Then Michael, who of course knew his (he would!). Myself.

"What is a Bath Oliver?" asked the question-master.

"A biscuit!" said I, so utterly relieved that I could have swooned. But I had five more to come! It was a complete shame that Pamela Frankau got a musical question, quite a simple one, but to an unmusical person a complete floorer. She was stuck, and she knows so much general knowledge that I felt enraged that she should have had this question.

Round I came again.

"Who was Bruce Bairnsfather?" was the enquiry.

To a woman who had known the family personally for quite a long time, this was too easy. I sailed out again growing cocky, which is always a mistake.

Next time it was a musical one, not my idea at all, because I am afraid music never appeals to me. This is a dreadful confession to make, but so much of it is crude, so much indifferent, that I do get sick of it.

The orchestra played a "piece", it was the Toreador's song from *Carmen*; I could give the act, I could give everything about it save the voice for which it was written. I said tenor, when it was baritone. Curse the cards! said I to myself (very nearly to the microphone!).

I was down on that, which I thought a swindle, considering I had got a lot of the reply right, but of course the knotty part was that I had not got it all right. As I came down I heard Peter Cheyney giving his first correct answer, to the enquiry "Who is known on the music hall stage as 'almost a gentleman'?" Michael got his next one, he hadn't failed yet.

I was very angry at coming a flop on that silly Toreador, because I ought to have known it. The next was simply money for jam, because I got the one intended for someone else, to do with a dog-watch, which was just too easy, though if they had asked me how many bells meant four o'clock I should have fluffed it badly. But the dog-watch I did know, (a) because you always go to tea on board during the first dog, and (b) you always go to gin on board for the second dog, so that's too easy!

The last question was easy too, or so I thought. It was "Where was Oliver Cromwell born?" And I should have got it right if it hadn't been for my perverse old grandmother. If and when we ever meet in a better land, which God forbid, because for me it will be no better land if we do meet there, I'll twist her tail! She was one of these know-all old ladies, who didn't know as much as she thought. She told me that nearly all the really famous people had been born in Norfolk (she was born in Norfolk, naturally), Oliver Cromwell amongst them.

Brightly I said "Norfolk, of course," thinking thank the Lord, here is another one that they can't catch me out on. Bang went the gong, and my startled face

must have been a revealer. Because I had been so sure that I knew it.

Michael, of course, knew his!

Then it was a Shakespeare quiz. I can't really remember who was in that, save that once more Peter Cheyney was there, and George Bankoff, who writes as George Sava. This time it was one of those mikes that you all cluster round, and stick your head in where you can. I had a hat with a lot of violets on it, and the stalks kept getting into Peter Cheyney's face, which was awkward.

I had thought this was going to be a quiz on Shakespeare quotations, and this was where I was going to show my brilliance, because although I am extremely ill-educated (I know almost nothing in this world), I do know my Shakespeare.

Living near Stratford-on-Avon, I started at the age of seven with Lamb's Tales, and the Shakespeare Festival, and gradually worked my way up so to speak. I spent hours of my life at Pa Benson's theatre, because then it was Pa Benson's theatre, and how we loved him!

My father made me write a *précis* of every play I saw, I had to read it first, I had to know it, and I had to learn most of the famous speeches off by heart. With what result? I know my Shakespeare.

So I went off all bright and bobbish, and my fond husband, who has had an immaculate education himself, being a prefect, the best boy ever, and all that sort of thing (therefore naturally thinking me the goose of the class), said "You'll come out on top on this."

But did I?

I did not!

It wasn't what it said.

Do you remember those Edwardian party games when you went out to a Bird tea, or a Book tea, or a Flower tea, and everything went in the form of a little wedding?

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What was her name? Miss L. Thrush, if it was a bird tea; Rose, if a flower tea; Little Dorrit, if a book tea. Well, it was that sort of thing. A descriptive bit was to be read, and then we were to fit in the blanks when they arrived, with the names of Shakespeare's plays. This I accepted with half-heartedness, because it wasn't at all what I had expected.

We clustered round the microphone. Somebody read a long script and said that the bride's attentions had been divided between . . . Somebody else got in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, before I had collected my shattered wits. They went for their honeymoon to . . . went on the reader. Somebody else said *Hamlet*.

But, I wanted to argue, that's most unfair, you don't go to Hamlet, you go to *a* hamlet! But the script had gone on; besides, one does not argue with the microphone. By the time she was buying her trousseau from the *Merchant of Venice*, I had just about collected myself, coming out with two plays to my credit, and not one more, and I, a woman who *knew* my Shakespeare.

"I don't think that was awfully good," said Robbie, as we drove home. I could see that he was disappointed in me.

"Good?" I echoed, "it was . . ." That was when we jumped the lights!

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Before the curtain now,
No Lady takes her bow.

WHEN I started to write plays for the B.B.C., and I have always found it one of the most delightful jobs, I looked at it as comprising a step to my ultimate target, the play for the straight stage.

There of course in my profound idiocy I made a mistake. The technical side of the radio play is entirely different from the one intended for the stage. On the radio you can trot all over the world if you wish, and there is nobody to say you nay (in fact they rather encourage you); on the stage, you can't.

Val Gielgud taught me a very great deal, but in everything in the literary world there is always more, and more, and yet more to learn. Now I cannot imagine how he put up with me at the start, I was surely the biggest boob at it, but I suspect that my real earnestness and ambition which have, thank Heaven, never aged in me, showed him that given a chance I might become quite a useful writer.

The time had now come when I had got do to a stage play.

I was worried about this. I foresaw a great deal of work, and everything wasted, because I simply did not know what I was doing. The plays I had written for the choir to act at home (with conspicuous success) were hardly likely to take me very far into this new field. I had got to learn. The thing to do was exactly a repeat performance of what I had done under the auspices of Colonel B. at the outset of my career, when he introduced me to Mahammed.

But although the mountain was floundering about in an abyss of uncertainty, where, oh where, was my Mahammed?

Then I got to know Mabel Constanduros better. I had a plot in my head; it was something that had happened in my extreme youth. I was thirteen at the time, when a neighbouring vicar's wife came bustling over to see my mother, and they sat chatting in the June garden under the trees. Presently the neighbouring vicar's wife burst into tears, said it was all just too awful, that she could never look the world in the face again, and that nobody would ever believe what had happened to her.

They then went into details of what *had* happened to her, and very fruity they were, when my mother unfortunately looking up saw me, trying to make myself small, and said "Shush, shush, the *child!*" in the way people did in those days.

The child remembered, and had always thought that it would make a most attractive play, and this was the juncture where she confided in Mabel Constanduros, who saw great possibilities in it. Mabel knows the work; she is helpful, she speaks my own language; all of which are essentials if one is to run in double harness comfortably with a collaborator.

She dined with us one evening, and after dinner we plotted the play together. Mabel is a miraculously quick worker; you would never believe that she could get through what she does, because she looks so tiny, and yet she seems to do most of her work before London wakes. Sleeping badly, in the wee sma' hours she gets a start on her competitors, and gets down to it with buck and vim.

But the writing of the play was very far from the landing of the play, which I hadn't known. I thought, as originally I had thought with Mahomed, that if

only one allied oneself to a well-known writer, who knew all the ropes, the thing was just too easy.

Oh heavens!

If I didn't want to write a play so desperately badly, if I were not so grimly determined to do it before I die, I don't suppose I'd ever look at a script again. The play was typed out in four fascinating-looking copies. It seemed wonderful. I laughed gaily as I read it, Mabel's dialogue was original and very good. Surely nobody could say no to it? But couldn't they just!

The play started going round, and meanwhile I got tired and started writing two more to please myself. The first was a comedy of evacuation, the other was ambitious. I fell down badly on both of them, I am sure, because in the second I attempted too much, and in the original one I did not attempt enough.

I put a lot of work into them, and the comedy I got expert advice on, touched and re-touched it, and suddenly to my wild surprise I got a nibble for it. C.B. again. I thank the goodness and the grace, once more!

Mr. Baxter Somerville came to see me at my flat one morning. Robbie had just come off duty. Now Robbie is a darling, but he will stick to Naval habits. His one idea is, if you want to do a deal, get the other side imperially bottled. He calls it mellow; he says soften their mood, whatever that means, and what he does is soften their heads, so that they are completely muddled, and wish that both Robbie and I were at the bottom of the deep blue sea!

Here was Robbie with his Naval drinks, which means about five times as strong as shore ones. And will he be guided? *No!* He has it that because I am T.T. I can't know. I, in my abstainer mood, am in no position to argue, but what can a woman do? I have seen strong men laid low, and men who are well inured to the stuff.

At one frightful party I saw six-footers laid flat in

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the arms of the Cranmer Court porters, and all because Robbie would go on hotting it up, in the mistaken belief that he was being a jolly good fellow, and oh-so-hospitable!

Mr. Somerville wanted to get away by train to Brighton. He apparently lived between Brighton, Leicester and Llandrindod Wells, and could you imagine three more different places? He had theatres at all of them, and went from here to there at speed. Before he left me he promised that ere Christmas came he would put on a play of mine, and he kept his word. And all this was before Robbie, elated beyond everything, started giving him really good ones, to make the morning (which was going admirably) go to pot completely!

Before the month was out, I knew that a play—whose title they changed to *Money for Jam*—was being produced at Leicester early in November.

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“You’ll learn such a lot by seeing rehearsals,” said C.B. “This is what we have wanted for you all along; when you see it taking shape, you can *see* your mistakes, and this will make an enormous difference to you.”

Oh, the goodness and the grace,
That made me in this happy place
A happy C.B. child!

I departed for Leicester early one week with my play billed for the following Monday, and my heart in my boots. Robbie had got a week’s leave to be spent this way; I would live at the Theatre Royal there, I would learn something, I hoped. I only prayed that all this experience was not going to be wasted on me.

The producer met me at the station, a nice girl, with definitely high-brow tendencies. She took us to the hotel, which was pleasant, and we had a suite which was comfy; we needed it too, because the work in hand was quite heavy. She left us with tickets for the ballet

that night, and Robbie and I went off and enjoyed ourselves at it.

Next morning I was at rehearsal at half-past ten. They had said "be prompt". I was so prompt that the entire theatre was locked as though against lions. It was barred and bolted, and I, a tragic and mournful figure, with an all-too flattering photograph of myself displayed outside, wandered round and round the building trying to break in.

When I got in, I went across the forlorn pit and stalls. Nothing can look so miserable as a theatre when it is empty. I heard voices behind the curtain, and scrambled up. The actors and actresses were sitting round on uncomfortable little chairs listening to the producer, standing with her back to the dropped curtain. She introduced me.

I think they had the feeling that the author had come to be a pest. They didn't realize that I, poor innocent creature, had come only to learn from them, not to find fault with them. They looked at me and I *felt* them think "Oh God, now for it!" I said "I promise I won't say a word," and instantly remembered that a producer had once told me that the worst authors were those who came in quietly, and then worked up to what he termed "a noble peak."

Were they now convinced that I was heading for a noble peak? They read the play. How right had been C.B.! How very, very right! It was shocking. The lines were redundant, they were not adequate, I did not clinch matters, people repeated themselves when they should have gone straight for the point.

Now there was no time to wrest the script from them, half learnt as it was, tear it home to the hotel and re-write it; besides, in my ignorance, I'd probably not make it much better. Sit still, said my heart to my you-know-what-I-mean, and my you-know-what-I-mean sat still.

I thought they didn't think much of it. The producer certainly didn't, because later in the week I found that her theory was that I wanted a spot of additional fame out of a play, and nothing more. She told me that I had overwritten myself. During this illuminating conversation when we were discussing plays, and I humbly was trying to do better, the news of our landing in North Africa came through on the radio. She didn't want to listen to it, I did, and would. To my horror I found that she was so one-sided that she simply had no interest in the war at all. She didn't give a tinker's cuss if we had started a second front or not!

I could have said something about that, but held my peace.

On the Thursday they had a bit of a "do" on at the theatre. Esmé Percy was there with a very beautiful play, *Distant Point*. After the show was over, I had to make a small speech, to say that he and I would come down into the stalls afterwards and sign autographs for anybody who wanted them.

It was one of the most pouring wet nights that I have ever known; the rain came down in sheets, and I had not been able to arrange for a taxi to take us away from the theatre after the show. I had had to dress myself up in a velvet frock, and pretty little shoes of the type that hate rain, but what else can you do when you have to go on to the stage? The funny thing was that I wasn't nervous. When I got on to the stage a bit of the roof had given, and the rain was coming down in a puddle beside me, and all I could do was say "Look at that!" with horror.

When Esmé Percy and myself got into the audience, with a spotlight on us, we were just snowed under. There wasn't a hope for us. We signed autographs like mad; I have always made up my mind that one of these days, in a fray like this, I'll keep count of the number of autographs that I sign, but I have never been able to,

because they come in such dozens that there you are before you can start coping with them.

Half an hour later, when we got out into the street, it was the blackest black-out I've ever seen, and rivers underfoot; the rain was coming down worse than ever. Robbie and I tottered home, clinging together, and it was not easy in a strange, rather twiddly place like Leicester. We were soaked through.

I had a boiling hot bath at once, but of course the damage was done. Next day I had got laryngitis.

Now to be afflicted on a Friday morning with laryngitis, with your first play coming on the following Monday night, and you down for a speech, *is* a bit hard! It is the sort of thing that could only happen to me, who is fated more frequently than I like to say or think.

I did everything I knew. I sucked the most revolting pastilles; I drank awful medicine, and went to bed with hot toddies. I drooped noticeably at rehearsals, couldn't help it. Then came the dress rehearsal.

They say that a bad dress rehearsal means a good show, but I have never seen anything so frightful as that dress rehearsal; nobody knew their parts to start with. I don't know how these repertory companies learn a play in a week, and I realize that I had made it very difficult for them, because none of my sentences seemed to link up, so that they could not get their cues from the last person.

Nobody had warned me of this; it is something I shan't forget again of course, but that didn't help them any. My idea of the characters and theirs hadn't coincided, though there was one man there, Hwfa Price, who was brilliant. He was acting the part of a young-middle-aged modest gent. staying in an hotel, and interested in *petit-point*, and until he sauntered on to that stage at the dress rehearsal I had never realized that the part was so effeminate.

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The hero couldn't remember two lines of it, all he kept saying was "God, I'm sorry!" Poor thing, I felt so sorry for him.

"I'll be all right to-night," he muttered at last, but how he would be all right to-night I had no idea. Nor how *I* would be all right to-night, because I had only just got to the husky whisper stage, although somebody said that if I went twenty-four hours without speaking a word I'd find I could get my voice back for a few minutes.

It is harder for me than for most women to go twenty-four hours without speaking, but I tried to do it.

Too depressed for words, I turned from the dress rehearsal. At the hotel telegrams had started coming in. Robbie, with true Naval acumen, was raking Leicester to find something with which to christen the play. He thought that it would be a matey idea if we broke a bottle or so with the company after the show, but nowadays when in a strange place it isn't easy to come by a bottle, and all that he could find was some Graves.

However, I had another thought. In the last act, two of the boys had to mop up two pints of beer. They were being served of course with water, and the leading man had protested. He had said: "I simply can't go about like a pond. I'll willingly pay for it myself if only you'll put beer on, but I can't drink all that water."

All along I had intended to see that real beer was served on the night, and that quite spoilt the little joke I'd got ready.

As I dressed for the evening show, hoping that I shouldn't blow my nose completely off my head, and that anyway the front row of the stalls would be able to hear what I'd got to say (nobody else would, that was a fact!), I opened telegrams and felt more and more miserable.

Everybody seemed sure that I should make a wild success of all this, instead of which here I was having

attended rehearsals to find it less and less of a success, leastways so I thought. I didn't know what to do. Then the hotel couldn't keep any supper for us. It looked as if I'd return to a couple of rock cakes going stale in a bag, and this on the night of my first play!

Robbie took it particularly hard.

We went off in a car to the theatre. Mr. Somerville had arrived. "Oh, I do hope that I'm not going to let you down," I said.

He was terribly nice. He thought it would be all right. Rehearsals were misleading. The leading man had also arrived and said that he knew his part now, which I didn't believe for a moment. The stage was settling down to it, and I was to go into the back row of the circle, which I had chosen as being somewhere to hide my shamed head. There was no box. Had there been, I should have sat on the floor with my back to the audience so that I could hear the horror and not see it. And there wouldn't have been any Graves left for the actors and actresses afterwards, because I should have had it with me. No, on second thoughts not with me, *in* me.

Having a play produced is the most awful experience that ever was!

In the back row I sat beside Robbie. Laryngitis, nose blowing hard, lump in throat, agony in heart! The orchestra arrived, lady at piano, lady with violin, and another who clawed up and down a 'cello. Soft music began. I started to eat a handkerchief. Before I realized its coupon value, I had eaten it completely.

"Can one die from eating handkerchiefs?" I whispered in misery to Robbie.

"No, I don't think so. Try mine next?"

"Don't give it me, I shall bite it to bits. I feel awful."

Mercifully they left me alone. House manager, producer, owner, they all knew the tricks, they realized that you leave the author to her agony, and write R I.P. tactfully.

The music ceased; the feeblest clapping, in which I did not join, occurred. We were on time. The orchestra started again. "I can't bear it," I groaned.

A red light went on somewhere near the lady at the piano, she changed her tune into the pre-arranged one, something quite inapt, and slowly the curtain rolled up. I had gone stone cold. I had no feet. I don't think I had a head left. A man's handkerchief, with awful tooth marks on it, lay crumpled in my lap.

In came the hero, cocksure as you like. He *knew* the part! You could not have believed that it was the same man as the one who had fluffed it all through the afternoon rehearsal; he went sailing through at speed; not a word was wrong. I don't know how these people do it!

The first laugh . . . at the right place. The second joke misfiring, nobody seeing it, agony down my spine! The next one getting there. Then the rather rude one, that we had debated as to whether we would keep in or push out, and it went with a bang.

So what?

The agony dies in the first five minutes. It's like having a tooth out. Once out, you wonder why you fussed so. The dentist becomes a nice man again, you like the anæsthetist, you feel rather a grand woman.

The play was going through.

During the first interval I was once more on speaking terms with the producer and the house manager, and could actually bring myself to carry on a conversation with Mr. Somerville. It is extraordinary how these people understand. I was most regretful about the handkerchiefs, for, with coupons, they represented a ghastly loss. And what an idiot I must have been to have eaten them!

Second act, everything going moderately smoothly; third act with now my whole mind on the speech; that and the wonder of the leading man who, not knowing

two lines of this part in the afternoon, had so far galvanized his forces as to be almost word perfect in the evening.

As the act ended I tip-toed down the back of the circle behind stage. I stood waiting in the wings. Would my voice ever make itself heard? Years ago as a little girl walking up Whimpstone Lane I had thought of this moment, when my nurse said I couldn't.

One day I'd face a theatre and say thank you.

Now I stood here waiting.

The curtain dropped; the manager went forward and said a few words, I tottered on. I croaked out my grateful thanks, and humble apologies for a maiden effort. Thank God, I've never been conceited.

Then the old voice went bad on me again, and I was thankful to see the curtain fall once more. Even the Graves wasn't much of a success, for everybody was scampering off to catch a last 'bus, or get home to baby, or something; and finally we ourselves returned to our supperless hotel.

My second effort in this line I never even went to see. It was a musical version of Charles Dickens' *Christmas Carol*, which was difficult to write because it is really the most unsuitable show for children, being very ghoulish. I'm glad I didn't go, because I am an ardent Dickens fan, and I believe that same producer sent Tiny Tim on as a principal boy with a red bow in her hair, about which I should have blown up!

In mid-autumn the composer, producer and I met at the Wigmore Hall and heard the music through. It was excellent. I had to get home to work, they wanted to discuss the script, and, most mistakenly, I asked them to tea. I was suffering from one of my bad migraine headaches, during which I am always violently allergic to smoke; I can't help it. Heaven knows that it is more of a curse to me than to my friends, though

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you would think from some of my friends that it was the other way about.

Nothing would stop these two from smoking.

I survived the taxi ride only by inches, having to dive into the flat to the bathroom to be sick. Recovering a bit, I tottered back to the sitting-room, where both were smoking only too gaily. In vain did I implore, they ignored me! I had sixty immediate letters to answer for the beauty page, so I had to excuse myself and go off thankfully to my study.

When I finished, I needed food. Was there a chance? Not an earthly! Supper was a couple of chops, our ration, the maid was rushing to and fro in a flap, because it was now an hour overdue, and they had settled in for the evening. I dared not go near my own sitting-room or I should have been sick again.

I made up my mind then and there that they could keep their *Christmas Carol*. Robbie thought me unreasonable, but it was a bit hard to be made physically sick in my own home even when it had been explained to them. If they had to smoke, they could have taken the script elsewhere. Nobody would have greeted such a move with greater joy than I.

So I never saw *Christmas Carol*, about which I was disappointed, but Boxing Day is difficult for travelling, and I thought there might be complications. Besides, I still felt hard about the composer's and producer's performance.

I love the theatrical world, the back-stage, the smell of grease paint, dusty boards, and the wires that lie here and there and trip you up if you don't watch out. Next to Fleet Street, it has got to be the stage.

Tea in dressing-rooms with dressers in and out, some smart and dapper, some a bit dowdy, all friendly. Ivor Novello who was so helpful about a play that I had in mind, but have for the moment been baulked on. Judy

Campbell, who, to my husband's amazement (he is a simple soul) took off her eyelashes and stuck them on the pin-cushion. D. A. Clarke-Smith who had his schoolboy son for the week-end, and, having lived a bachelor life during the early part of the week at a provincial hotel, launched into a double room to be greeted next morning with the early tea, and "Good morning, sir. Good morning, *madam!*" Yvonne Arnaud, with her delightful accent. Dame Sybil Thorndike who always gives you the feeling that she can't be an actress at all really, but just somebody's mother, and such a dear!

No, I've got to get a play put on!

C.B. suggested that it would help the play that Mabel and I had going, if we got it passed by the censor. Sent to Windsor Castle, it came back with three pages in a mess. I had thought there might be trouble, though everyone had howled me down, quoting other worse plays, but then that is no argument. Somebody else can do all sorts of things you personally cannot do, and surely every one of us has found this out at some time or another.

It was suggested again that somebody should go down to Windsor Castle and beard the lion in its den. "Oh yes," said I, with a pretty good idea whose way this might be coming. Further debate, then the suggestion that I was the person. I might as well take it as leave it, I thought; after all, I did want to get the play on, and nothing was to be gained by shirking a bridge that had obviously got to be crossed at some time or another. So I went.

It was one of those brilliant September days, with a lovely gold sunshine filtering everywhere, and one of the last times that we ever used the car during the war, so I can look upon it with the deepest affection. I was armed with all kinds of passes, and we took it in leisurely fashion. I had an idea that it was going to be difficult. I could only do my best, I felt.

Arrived at Windsor gateway, the police halted us; I got out and went into a small room with two policemen and my pass. They looked at me disappointedly.

"We heard Mrs. Buggins was coming," said they.

I apologized profusely. Mabel, I said, was delayed, she couldn't make it, I had come alone, I was very sorry. Autograph books which had been prepared were put away. I was noticeably a dud.

We went to a far corner of the castle, where again a policeman received me, told Robbie where to park the car, and then ushered me inside, into rather a middle-class hall. It was really very ordinary, I felt. I had hoped for something ormolu; this wasn't ormolu, it was just dull.

"Arthur?" called the policeman.

I craned my neck to see what Arthur might be. Arthur was a flunkey, not over-dressed; he took me through innumerable passages, and finally across a courtyard to another part of the castle altogether. All the time I was thinking what an admirable place for Hide-and-Seek. Really I envied the little Princesses for having this, because you could hide here and never be caught. But probably they had never even been in the part of the castle where I was.

We now entered another building, where probably the great man dwelt. A door was rapped upon smartly, and I was ushered into a room not unlike the library at my mother-in-law's house, No. 6 Prince's Gate. It was certainly furnished in the same detestable period.

Long curtains, rather ornate early-Edwardian furniture, tables whose tops were glass cabinets, with a lot of gilt work, and the censor sitting there.

He was charming.

All the way here I had been anxious that he would adopt that very difficult attitude of hinting at this and that, and pretending that he did not know why he objected, but he just did object. He was completely

matter-of-fact, for which I was devoutly thankful. Nothing was easier than discussing the play, he could not have been more pleasant. I wanted to give way on every minor point that I could, because I have always found that is the only way to gain the point you really wish to gain.

Whilst we were talking, my eye wandered to the little table beside the chair where I was sitting. It was round, made of some light wood, with another of these maddening little round cabinet tops, which Queen Alexandra apparently liked so much. On it was a small tin of the kind that hold tobacco, like a Wills' cigarette tin, only the cover was plain paper, and labelled on it at the bottom were two printed words, which held my gaze for one split second.

The two words were "Baby's Bottom."

Once I had seen this, of course, I could not get my mind off it. What in the name of fortune was it doing here in the Censor's office in Windsor Castle? Had it come up for censorship? If so, had it passed the censor? Or not? Not, I thought. And did he censor that kind of thing? I wanted to ask him, but got cold feet.

For half an hour we sat talking, he really was charming, and ultimately he came out and across the courtyard with me, dispensing with the services of Arthur, who was hanging about in the background.

It had been a delightful morning.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

How now?
No Lady takes a bow.

I HATE to think that when walking down Fleet Street I shall never again see W. J. Makin, who died with the war correspondents in Normandy. I saw him just before he went. Makin was the most interesting journalist I ever knew, we met when he was a sub. on *P.W.* He became editor ultimately, and then went out to Cyprus. During the war he had done all sorts of things; editing a paper in a cave in Greece, fighting with patriots, and he came back to England and we met for a brief lunch at the Ivy. I never realized that it would be the last time that we should meet, though I knew that he was going out for D-Day with the troops, but somehow one could never think of W. J. Makin dying. He was too full of life for that.

One of his pet stories was of how to get the interview he wanted. In Pekin he had acted as an undertaker, which had been very morbid but wildly exciting. Just before the burial the corpse was on show in a sitting-room with everybody paying respects, and suddenly a buck nigger photographer came in to take the last photograph, and Makin had to hold up the corpse's head for this, which had been a bit more than he had bargained for when he took the job on.

Then they had driven through the streets of Pekin, he sitting beside the driver of the hearse, and nearly falling off every time they went round corners. There was nothing that he hadn't done, and done well.

There are the publishers, I seem to have worked for most of them, Hutchinson, Collins, Harrap (with one

big flop), Rich & Cowan, Cassell, not to mention several others. I still maintain that Roddy Rich was the nicest man to work for, bubbling over with bright ideas, always enthusiastic, always willing to see you (which some aren't, thinking that your business must be pestilential), and although Roddy Rich's authors' business often was pestilential, he didn't seem to give a damn! He was always "seeable". Not only was he "seeable", but when a land-mine knocked my flat into the middle of next week, and I just had nowhere to lay my head, Roddy Rich strode in amongst the broken glass, with myself gone grey with cement, in the most awful siren suit you ever saw, and lent me his flat for ten days until I could find my bearings!

Greater love hath no publisher than that he lay down his flat to his author.

I wish very much that I had been able to meet Colonel B. once more. Had I never met Colonel B., I could never have been where I am to-day, but he has disappeared into the limbo of lost things. Also Mahommed.

I found Mahommed again in 1929, when I was doing rather well, and I persuaded him to come to tea with me. He arrived looking suspicious.

"What do you want?" he asked.

This was embarrassing, because what I had really wanted was to be helpful. He had done more for me than anybody else in Fleet Street; for the last five years I had never seen one line of his in print, and I gathered that he must have fallen on evil times. I wanted to know if, by alliance with my name again, I could help at all, but hardly liked to say so early in the tea party.

"Oh, nothing at all, nothing at all," said I brightly. "Just to see you again."

It didn't work.

Mahommed wanted nothing from me; what he had given he had given freely, he said. He had purposely

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withdrawn from the magazine world, because he intended to write a play that would make the stalls fly into the gods! He had the germ of an idea and was working on it steadily. "Soon," said he, "Enkosikaas, you will see my name in letters of fire. The red hunter will charge into where they once reaped corn in Piccadilly."

Of course it was the same old Mahammed, and I was left dithering and not knowing what in the world he was talking about, nor even if he was talking at all. When the red hunter started swashbuckling about I was undone.

He left after a couple of cucumber sandwiches and two cups of tea. I have never seen him again. And, alas, I have never seen his name in letters of fire, and I would like to do so. I would like it very much.

In adieu, to those who come after me down the street of adventure, there are one or two things that I would like to say with affection. The art of writing burns in you as an immortal flame; even if you write tripe, the same flame lights that tripe, because it is something that you cannot quench. It has got to light your path, otherwise you will never succeed. Never pay any attention to the scoffing of relatives, to the adulations of devoted friends, or to the warnings of the hardness of the way.

The path is hard. It is so hard that sometimes looking back No Lady wonders how she tottered along it, but the flame and the longing, and the wild enthusiastic ambition, were all she (or you) needed.

Go to it, and good luck!

But life being what it is, and people what they are, let me give you an imaginary conversation of sixty years on, from the very start of this book.

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"You see, I was a writer," said No Lady, aged sixty-three.

"I always knew you would be," said my nurse.

"And I did quite well in my own humble way," said No Lady.

"Well, of course you would. Don't talk so silly," said my nurse.

Dear, kind, affectionate and *lying* Nurse (if still alive), it wasn't so silly really!

THE END

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